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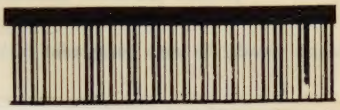

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TRAGEDY

"Of philosophers," says Diogenes Laertius, "some were dogmatic and others were inclined to suspend their opinions. By dogmatic, I mean those who explain their opinions about matters as if they could be comprehended. By those who suspend their opinions, I mean those who give no positive judgment, thinking these things cannot be comprehended."

Timarchus, as reported by Plutarch in the Discourse concerning *Socrates' Dæmon*, when he heard the voice in the cave of Trophonius, into which he had descended, ask him, "Timarchus, what dost thou desire to understand?" answered, "Everything. For what is there that is not wonderful and surprising?"

"Ubi magnitudo, ibi veritas."—*St. Augustine.*

"As I walked about, either in my hunting, or for viewing the country, the anguish of my soul at my condition would break out upon me on a sudden, and my very heart would die within me to think of the woods, the mountains, the deserts I was in; and how I was a prisoner, locked up with the eternal bars and bolts of the ocean."—*Defoe.*

"There is, I think, no man that apprehends his own miseries less than myself, and no man that so nearly apprehends another's. I could lose an arm without a tear, and with few groans, methinks, be quartered into pieces; yet could I weep most seriously at a Play, and receive with true passion the counterfeit grief of those known and professed Impostures."—*Sir Thomas Browne.*

"The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from its being in close relationship with beauty and truth."—*Keats.*

"Disciples do owe unto masters only a temporary belief, and a suspension of their own judgment till they be fully instructed, and not an absolute resignation, or perpetual captivity."—*Bacon.*

TRAGEDY

BY

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Tragedia cothurnata, fitting Kings,
Containing matter, and not common things.
The Spanish Tragedie.

THIRD EDITION

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To
THE LOVERS OF GREAT MEN
AND THEIR SPECULATIONS

NOTE

For a number of corrections and suggestions while these pages were in preparation I am indebted to my friends, Professor Grierson, of Edinburgh, and Professor Dewar, of Reading.

W. M. D.

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TRAGEDY

I. THE ENJOYMENT OF TRAGEDY

St. Augustine, in that simple yet searching fashion of his, describes the perplexity he felt at his enjoyment of imagined grief, the fictitious sorrows of the theatre. "Stage plays also carried me away, full of images of my miseries and of fuel to my fire. Why is it that man desires to be made sad, beholding doleful and tragical things, which yet himself would by no means suffer? Yet he desires as a spectator to feel sorrow at them and this very sorrow is his pleasure. What is this but a miserable madness? For a man is the more affected with those actions, the less free he is from such affections. Howsoever, when he suffers in his own person it uses to be styled misery; when he hath fellow suffering then it is mercy. But what sort of compassion is this for feigned and scenical passions? For the auditor is not called on to relieve, but only to grieve, and he applauds the author of these fictions the more, the more he grieves. And if the calamities of these persons (whether

of old times or mere fictions) be so acted that the spectator is not moved to tears, he goes away disgusted and criticizing; but if he be moved to passion, he sits intent, and weeps for joy."

What answer to this question can be given? Suffering, calamity, death—to be willing witnesses of these, to be put out of conceit with ourselves and shown to what misfortunes we lie hourly open, to sit at ease before the spectacle of human misery, to see hope slain and love defeated, and to give thanks to the poet who brings all this before our eyes, the more thanks the more poignant his picture, there is something here not a little perplexing, and, if we are interested spectators of our own nature, worthy of more than passing examination.

And though wise interrogation be, as Bacon said, *half a knowledge*, yet, of writers on tragedy, most have been content to leave this, surely a central problem, unstudied. Aristotle, eagerest of inquirers, is curiously incurious in the matter. We are somehow pleased, he assumes, when the poet exhibits men like ourselves racked by anxiety, afflicted, ruined. True, we are not to expect too much. "We must ask of tragedy *not every kind of pleasure* but only that which is proper to it." The restriction hardly suffices to dissolve the strangeness of the words. In this country, inhabited by the forlorn and miserable, we are, it seems, to travel for our enjoyment. And what kind of gratification are we to expect

in a region more suited, one might say, for the grave than for the birthplace of delight? The Aristotelian statement admits of no qualification, nor is it in dispute. Pleasure in tragedy undeniably most of us do take, and the greater our suffering the warmer our applause. The business of the dramatist is, indeed, to provide just this distressing spectacle. And the more piteous and terrible the events, if, let us suppose, the *deed of horror* is wrought within the family, when murder, or the like, is done, or meditated, by son on father, mother on son, or son on mother, so much, argues our philosopher, the better: *these are, in fact, the situations the poet should seek after.* We are not to look for mitigation of the dreadfulness, but extreme instances of it, the most monstrous and appalling that life can offer, when it turns upon us its Medusa-like countenance of frenzy and despair.

C'est une étrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens—says Molière, yet a stranger, if we ponder it, to offer them grief as a means to happiness. That is, in effect, the tragedian's proposal, to reverse by his skill in husbandry, or some other art, the order of Nature, to pluck grapes from thorns and figs from thistles. How has it, for we are dealing with an achievement, been accomplished, by what grace of Apollo, cunning of his own or knowledge of a hidden law? And without the assistance, it should be noted, of indifference, the

carelessness or disinterestedness of mind which keeps disturbing emotion at a distance. In the company of the tragic poets, moreover, we part company with mirth and with those who cannot part with it, since, as Bergson tells us, *laughter is incompatible with emotion*, and tragedy involves our emotional no less than our intellectual nature, has to do with pity and fear, with sympathies which emerge in us only when things assume importance, and by whose intensity that importance is in fact measured.

II. TRAGEDY AN ART

Setting aside vulgar errors, let us, standing at the door of this inquiry, remind ourselves that in real life there are no tragedies. A tragedy is a work of art designed to please. It is a work of art, and the sufferings of the spectator, if he can be said to suffer, are more than voluntary, they are solicited. He is a party to the sacrifice of Iphigenia, and content to protract the agony of Phædra. Anthony's downfall casts no melancholy upon his spirit, and the death of Cordelia makes for his happiness. To be sure it is not from the thing itself but from the imitation that, as Aristotle tells us, his pleasure springs, and the sorrows of life, we may allow, as reflected from the dramatist's mirror, have never broken, and cannot break, the heart.

> Was im Leben uns verdriesst,
> Man im Bilde gern geniesst.
>
> What in life doth only grieve us,
> That in art we gladly see.

Art makes life a game, and as children delight in tales of ghosts and goblins, or kill their wooden soldiers in the nursery wars, we, too, enjoy the terrible in its image ; a crisis holds us. To yield the

point is not to close the discussion. For we shall, in Burke's words, "be much mistaken if we attribute any considerable part of our satisfaction in tragedy to the consideration that it is a deceit, and its representations no realities." And that suffering, even though mitigated by representation, even when pictured not perceived, should minister to delight remains a strange thing, not immediately intelligible; a finger pointing, if we are lovers of such country, to the most pleasantly varied philosophical scenery.

From sculpture and painting the terror and the mystery are absent, their subjects are rarely painful. But if testimony to human suffering were needed poetry alone could supply it. The afflicted may be met in all her walks and arbours, *flens quam familiariter*, "weeping as if at home there." The others, her sisters, are smiling arts. The frieze of the Parthenon, Titian's *Amor sagro e profano*, Beethoven's sonata in E flat Major might have formed part of the history of a painless world, might have been the fruits of angelic leisure in some earthly paradise, loveliness within loveliness, apples of gold in a network of silver. Not so poetry, which differs from the rest, sits close to life, and like a well-fitting garment, displays its form and members. In tragedy, then, where by general consent she rises to her full stature, we may expect from poetry a reason, a justification of her choice of subject,

so strange and so forbidding as human misery; some understanding, too, of its presentation, whereby though confronted with pain we are submerged in pleasure; pleased, as Hume has it, *in proportion as we are afflicted.*

The question first asked, however, is not infrequently the last to be answered, and we shall presently find ourselves in a very thicket of difficulties, pretty problems arising on every hand to exercise the mind; and I propose here, instead of a treatise, a conversation with myself or a reader, a discourse designed to preserve an interest in the topic proposed whithersoever the argument tends, rather than to extinguish it by a triumphant conclusion; the more so since we may be easy in mind that no talent, nor genius either, will achieve that.

And, though we remain at their mercy and must do our best with them, it is well to remember that we are—and the philosophers and men of science in like case with us—at all times but dealers in words, for which we cannot have too great a respect or of which, at the same time, too grave a suspicion. There are combinations of them much to be admired and yet other combinations much to be distrusted. We eat, drink, and breathe words, and are so charmed with their airs of wisdom and engaging manners that we forget their pretences and overlook their frequent sophistries. We mis-

take these insubstantial shadows for accredited guides to the shrine of reality, and suppose them capable interpreters of all the mysteries. As if conventional and invented sounds, indefinable save by others of equally disputable and varying significance, were, instead of their far-off and deceiving echoes in our minds, things themselves. As well imagine it possible to reconstruct the world by means of such symbols, as that we could, were it destroyed, rebuild St. Peter's from memory, with paper saws and cardboard mallets.

The subject, then, is "tragedy" and in the main, "poetical tragedy," not "tragedies," and of the forgotten ten thousand, of dramas other than the more famous, there will be no mention. To cite them were a superfluity, and—without disparagement of their authors—as well attempt a census of the dead as enter the cemetery of these lifeless forms.

Tragedy, let us agree, is a work of art, but at the same time poetry's point of implication with philosophy and religion, and therein—on that side—worthy of a more particular attention than it has commonly received; if the dealings of the poets with the most fundamental of all questions be, as they are here assumed to be, not less conspicuous for honesty and good intentions than those of other men. Whether tragedy be at all possible under the protection and in the light of

revealed religion—a matter not now to be surveyed —admits of some doubt. Manifestly the tragic poets have their own way of approach to the enigmas of the world, and our business here is to follow it. A discussion of tragedy to be profitable demands an open mind, and the same freedom that is claimed for philosophy or for science.

III. THE WORD *TRAGEDY*

The word "tragedy" tells us nothing of the thing itself, and for this reason. The word came early, preceded the chief masterpieces, was the coinage not of a modern writer, looking back over the creations of previous ages, but of men the contemporaries of its earliest and most primitive type, and is thus, like the name given a child at its birth, valueless as a description of the creature, though it may be usefully employed as a label; a convenient term in this case for an artistic form of peculiar interest though embarrassing variety. Nor can the original meaning of *τραγῳδία*, however interpreted, greatly assist anyone in quest of its later characteristics or true nature. That a goat was the prize in the earliest tragical contests, or was sacrificed on such occasions to the god or hero in whose honour they were held, or again that the performers wore, probably that earliest of human garments, a goat skin, or the more ingenious conjecture connecting it with *τραγίζειν* meaning when used of the voice, *to be cracked*—which would suggest *wailing song* as the proper rendering, since grief finds its natural expression in broken accents or irregularity of vocal pitch—such guesses

have their interest, but belong to a different inquiry.

We may for the moment describe tragedy as a way of thinking about the world presented dramatically, in story form, but of thinking directed towards certain aspects of human life and experience, a way of thought with a bias of special interest. To reach its centre we must ask, what is that bias ? And the answer would seem to be that, simple in simple times with simple folk, more complex with others, but always and of necessity governed by predominant opinions, coloured by prevailing religious or philosophical conceptions, in all forms and varieties tragedy is preoccupied with the more serious, enigmatic or afflicting circumstances of life. Tragedy for most of us, indeed, means simply the body of dramatic literature whose chief interests fall within this circle ; a region sufficiently extensive, to enter which is, some would say, to enter no suburb of experience, but the capital city of life itself, thronged and throbbing, wherein are staged for the beholders all imaginable acts and scenes of man's chequered history; so that it is a mere useless labour to distinguish, and better and true enough at once to declare the whole world a tragic stage, and all men actors thereon, and tragedy, contrasted at least with the distorted reflections of romance or comedy, the plain mirror of our earthly existence.

IV. PHILOSOPHERS AND TRAGEDY

Nevertheless the acceptance of categorical assertions is clean against nature, and carries in addition the disadvantage that it cuts short the pleasures of debate, on this topic unusually attractive, a positive banquet of thought, where are present many and famous philosophers; at some distance, indeed, from their proper homes, yet each still confident and in the completest and most engaging disagreement with the rest—Aristotle, Hume, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, to name only the protagonists—who, attracted to the neighbourhood, as it were by some teasing riddle of the mind, have here, in the midst of mightier labours, made trial of their strength.

There have been, indeed, both poets and critics who declined to extend any welcome to professional philosophers in this domain.

"I ask not proud Philosophy to teach me what thou art," they say, insisting with some show of reason that poetry is in no way either indebted to, or in need of, such intrusion. Much as science has aimed at the withdrawal from poetry of the *empire of fact*, philosophy, they contend, would withdraw from her the *empire of thought*, which

she is in no mind to relinquish. These men, they proceed, without much respect for poetry or understanding of her, seem none the less uneasily desirous of her support, and those who attempted to set forth the ruling ideas of tragedy were too often clearly enough inspired more by a passion for the completion of their darling systems than for the elucidation of its peculiar nature; behaving unbecomingly, as masters rather than disciples of the tragic artists, and caring not at all what tragedy was, hastened to declare what it should be. It has been charged, in short, against the philosophers that they suffer from a professional handicap, that for the most part theirs is a kind of *a priori*, unwritten tragedy, to which they are very welcome, but that, on the bed of Procrustes constructed by them, the limbs of the great existing masterpieces they professed to examine were stretched or carved to match its unfriendly and bizarre dimensions.

Whatever ground there may be for animadversions so severe it cannot now be reviewed, nor the proposal—a cynical one—to measure their value as metaphysicians from their excursions into literature. To judge, for example, of Hume from his admiration of the Epigoniad, or of Hegel's account of the world from his account of tragedy, were, no doubt, a discourteous irony. Let us assume, to avoid these pitiless exposures, that they were better equipped to deal with the whole

than with the parts, with the universe than with art, or that they gave to the latter but half their minds. Like Homer they, too, must be allowed their drowsy moments, and we, who are willing to use any man's lamp for our guidance, may yet be grateful for their proffered light. There is here, indeed, involved a delicate question, not openly nor sufficiently in this or former times examined—*whether poets or philosophers have best understood the world?*—to which a discussion of tragedy almost inevitably leads. A seductive theme, but having other matters immediately in hand, let us, in Plutarch's phrase, bid farewell to it now.

V. IS THE PLEASURE OF TRAGEDY DUE TO MALEVOLENCE?

What then do we owe the tragic poets and for what do we give them thanks? To what is our pleasure in tragedy really due? To the element, some shrewd observers maintain, of pure malevolence in the fabric of our nature. Cruelty is in our blood. Not only from the misfortunes of our enemies, but from the sufferings of those who have done us no injury, with whom we have no quarrel, we extract an oblique and sinister satisfaction. If we are ourselves exempt from danger or distress, the danger or distress of others is, they assure us, delectable; to breathe freely while others fight for breath, to watch from the shore another struggling with the waves. So Lucretius, a plain speaker,

> Suave, mari magno turbantibus æquora ventis,
> e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;[1]

Sweet it is when the winds are at work on the waters to witness from the shore another's deep distress. To put aside so unpalatable a doctrine with a gesture of disgust, or a peremptory denial of its truth were too easy a means of escape. Flattering to

[1] *De Rerum Natura.* Bk. II. 1–2. See, however, the following lines.

human nature it is not; yet recall the bitter saying, *homo homini lupus*, recall the auto-da-fés, the instruments of torture, the rack, the wheel, the thumbscrew, the innumerable malignancies of man, and none will deny that in the crevices of the soul there lurk hateful things more than a few. Turning an inward eye upon ourselves we may find some warrant for this teaching. But listen to that most sagacious, noble, and compassionate soul, Edmund Burke. He allows the argument. "I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others." He carries it further. "Choose a day on which to represent the most sublime and affecting tragedy we have; appoint the most favourite actors; spare no cost upon the scenes and decorations, unite the greatest efforts, of poetry, painting, and music; and when you have collected your audience, just at the moment when their minds are erect with expectation let it be reported that a State criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square; in a moment the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of the imitative arts and proclaim"—What? The triumph of malevolence? No! "The triumph of the real sympathy." In Burke's view the arresting power, the fascination, the pleasure, if you care to call it so, of the painful spectacle is there

by the Creator's ordinance, and greatest where our sympathy is the most needed. Were it otherwise, on every scene of misery we would hastily turn our backs. Suffering commands our attention that it may elicit our fellow feeling. Pity is the sacred link between mortals, the girdle of the globe, and to preserve pity in us the sorrowful tale is given a universality, a comprehensiveness, an attraction that belongs to no other.

Every argument on any subject, thought Protagoras, could be countered by another. The *malevolence theory* may be met in Burke's way. Though the doctrine contains, that is to say, some truth, it is not all the truth, nor the truth in this affair. Doubtless there is something in it, but for our purposes how little! So spiritless, so half-hearted a malevolence, so mitigated a malice as, in a world like ours, contents itself with the woes of Troy and Thebes, or, with ten thousand griefs at its doors over which to rejoice, with ten thousand houses of mourning in its neighbourhood easy of entrance, slinks to its indulgence in a playhouse, appears *in articulo mortis*, and already wears a wan and spectral air. A robust malevolence should be made of sterner stuff, and would find, one fancies, but a shadowy joy, a meagre diet in the pangs of Prometheus or of Faustus, the agonies of Ajax or of Lear. This malignity is clearly out of health.

The theory might, however, be greatly strengthened if it could be proved that the lovers of tragedy were more numerous among malevolent than among benevolent persons—a thesis which might be recommended to its supporters, but for which so far no evidence appears to have been offered.

If, however, this curiosity of opinion be accepted, and the pleasure of tragedy declared a refinement of the savage pleasure of the arena, where the Christian meets the lion, or the retiarius is slain by the myrmillo, if sensational thrill *simpliciter*, be its secret, the dusty conclusion puts an end to inquiry. But whither, then, have vanished the beauty and the pathos, the heights and the depths, the flux and reflux of that human sea on which we adventure with the poets? No such simple key will turn the wards of our intricate lock, nor will a civil judgment venture to account in this fashion for the pleasure, elevated if any pleasure be elevated, that the world from century to century has derived from tragedy. If dismissed—and a philosophy so crude as to make Æschylus and Shakespeare panders to malevolence, may be dismissed without misgiving as a perversity, a mere violence—with it we may reject another, also too simple to be sufficient, that any heightening of sensation is a good, any occupation of the mind better than tedium, that any rise in the barometer of consciousness, though it springs from pain itself,

makes for a form of happiness. One has to complain not that the psychology is wholly false, but that it is painfully inadequate. Reasons further to seek, and less immediately found, must explain to us how the *Prometheus* "wrestles with and conquers time," or *Hamlet* overruns Italy and subjugates the Teutonic mind.

VI. DOES PAIN GIVE BIRTH TO PLEASURE?

While some among the dictators of opinion insist that the pain of others, the tragic sufferers, brings us joy, humaner, if more melancholy spirits, are drawn to a creed widely different. From our own wounds, they tell us, we derive delight. "Some inexplicable defect of harmony in the constitution of human nature," Shelley believed, provides the clue. "The pain of the inferior is frequently connected with the pleasures of the superior parts of our being." *Our sympathy in tragic fiction depends on this principle; tragedy delights by affording a shadow of that pleasure which exists in pain.* How diverse are the views with which men profess themselves content! As the Bacchanal seeks his heaven by self-inflicted wounds, he who would experience happiness must crave the knife, must pay in coin of bitterness for the purchase of the sweet. Manifestly we stand here upon that metaphysical and misty slope, dangerous to the plain man, where the thesis tends to melt into the antithesis, and objects appear less themselves than their opposites. *In tristitia hilaris, in hilaritate tristis,* pleasure becomes pain and pain pleasure.

No doubt it may be so. Pity, others again say, is but self-pity in disguise. We weep for ourselves, being reminded of our own sufferings by those we witness. Again it may be so. Leopardi's visit to Tasso's tomb, where he was moved to tears, is described by him as "the first and only pleasure I have found in Rome." The pleasures of melancholy have been the theme of more than one poet, and self-pity yields, there is no lack of evidence for it, at least a twilight satisfaction; an acquired and esoteric taste, perhaps, but before now men have fondled their grief, and many like Schopenhauer, we may believe, made of despair a sweetmeat for the mind. A pretty accomplishment, and in this harsh world as useful, perhaps, as many another, yet uncommon; the number of those, at least, who of set purpose seek suffering in order to be happy, pursue enjoyment by way of distress, who voluntarily incur pain, be it heartache or any other, to pluck from it the delights of self-compassion running not, one fancies, in any society to many thousands. Were it an easy or a common art, if by some simple alchemy men could transmute their afflictions into joys, how pleasant were the world. The greatest sufferers might then be envied, the pessimist answered out of his own mouth, and the woes of humanity agreeably extinguished. Not so lightly is the magic formula for the conversion of gall into honey discoverable, nor is this

circuitous route to Elysium chosen by the ordinary traveller. No one runs after misery in order that he may compassionate himself, as a man climbs a mountain, willingly enduring the fatigue for the prospect.

So brief a glance into the labyrinth of the emotions, which still baffles, and will long continue to baffle, explorers, has little value save to reveal its windings, and is, for students of tragedy, well-nigh profitless. Let those better equipped for voluminous undertakings explore it. Let us with what courage it requires avow Butler's honest creed. "Everything is what it is and not another thing." Allow that pain is distasteful in all shapes and wherever encountered. Allow, too, another possibility. Although this form of drama provides it, pleasure may in the end prove rather the accompaniment than the object of our search; since it may very well be that beyond its broad and common ways, in the gloomier defiles of life, amid the grief-worn faces and under the clouded skies of tragedy we may seek knowledge, wisdom, an enlargement of the spirit, the meaning of things or some other ends, which—it is strangely and too often forgotten—not less than pleasure, and even at the cost of pain, lay their insistent commands upon men.

VII. CLASSIC AND ROMANTIC

Twice only has tragedy flowered to full perfection, once in Periclean Athens and again in Elizabethan England. The great tragic artists of the world are four, and three of them are Greek. These three had ridden down all challengers, but for the appearance in the lists of a solitary champion of the Romantic drama well worth their sight, less heavily horsed and armed, indeed, but with a falcon's eye and wrist of steel. No one doubts that Racine, and others too, Corneille, Alfieri, Lope de Vega, Calderon, were eminent. Racine's constructions are masterpieces; he understood the soul, he divined the feelings, his insight into character is profound, of the ways of love he knew all that may be known; but admittedly, neither he nor they could for the moderns, without Shakespeare, have sustained the shock of the ancients. Yet, within even so confined a survey as omits them, there is room enough, since to view together Greece and England, the so widely separated classic and romantic types, has its perils and stretches both thought and imagination.

A cloud, we know, descends upon each age as it recedes in time, the cloud of change, so that for its

motives, preferences, prejudices, its beliefs, opinions, acts and arts the intellectual sight grows dim. The apparatus of scholarship, a painful requirement whose office is to clear the vision, to provide a contemporary's eye, becomes, it is inevitable, increasingly and unpleasantly burdensome. Greek tragedy is very far off, two thousand years and more : no marvel, then, that knowledge, a scholar's, is needed for its comprehension, a mental telescope of high power. The Greek language, a difficult one, forbids easy approach ; the peculiar and distinctive genius of the Hellenic peoples erects still another barrier. The hindrance, the disabling hindrance to our comprehension of this drama is, however, more fundamental—its religious background, its religious pre-occupations and implications. That Greek tragedy rested on a sacred ritual, dealt with a sacred legend, was performed in a sacred place and in honour of a sacred person, we can in some measure comprehend. These are externals. But the Hellenic tendency to identify morals with piety, to think of the good man as a religious man, a worshipper, and, above all, to see life always in its setting, mysterious and divine in origin, mysterious and divine in its manifestations, these are for us veritable sources of bewilderment. Men of our time are not accustomed or anxious so to think of life, least of all in the theatre. The modern man regards the drama, he is compelled to regard it, as

a secular amusement. Shakespeare's audiences three hundred years ago certainly so regarded it. The Puritans, self-appointed guardians of religion, waged incessant war upon the theatre, and at least no one claims Elizabethan playgoers, whether Catholic or Protestant, as the most pious men of their time. In its original form the romantic drama was not, indeed, less closely associated with a religious ritual than the Greek. Its beginnings in the Easter festival of the church—during which with due ceremony the crucifix was taken from above the altar, placed beneath it and later restored with solemn hymn and thanksgiving as a symbol of the God's Resurrection—were an extension, an adornment of the usual ecclesiastical service. In England, as in Greece, the ritual passed into the play. While in Greece, however, the ceremony never lost its solemn and religious character, never ceased to be an act of homage to the god, by Shakespeare's day the long alliance between religion and drama had come to an end; and so complete was its secularization that no trace of his theatre's origin could have been so much as suspected by an Elizabethan auditor. He had long since ceased to be a worshipper and become a pleasure seeker,

> "No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
> Of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming."

While, too, the Hellenic myths, old stories of the

old days when gods still trod the earth, shared the interests and trafficked in the affairs of mortals, remained almost the sole material of the tragic artists, the corresponding storehouse of Biblical tradition had in England been cast wholly aside. Had it been retained—but so vast a speculation is idle. This alone is certain, that for dramatic purposes it was in nothing inferior to the Greek myths.

VIII. THE MYSTERY CYCLES

The Mystery cycles, which for five centuries fascinated and instructed the English folk, lacked neither poetry nor power over the imagination. They hardly needed the poet's or the compiler's skill. They dealt with a history not only the most familiar of all histories to their auditors, but the only body of knowledge beyond that of their own immediate and personal experience, the only history with which they had any acquaintance. The only history have I said? The only philosophy, science, cosmology, poetry. Apart from its instruction the world's past was for them a blank. What is of higher importance still, they represented not fiction but fact, truth believed absolute and incontrovertible, the truth of Christian doctrine. However far they wandered in search of matter for amusement or diversion, however they distorted the faith by their artlessness, they threw no shadow of doubt on its fundamental truth. No uncertainty clouded the minds of the authors, of the actors, of the gazing spectators. To what other plays the world has ever seen belonged this immense initial advantage? The broad current of belief swept away on its unquestioning tide all feeble or absurd conceptions,

all faults of art, all trivialities of detail. And this knowledge, that they were not merely presenting a story but the tremendous facts of the world's past annals and future destiny, gave to the actors a sense of responsibility, a sincerity of expression since unparalleled. These men, chosen for their fitness by trade and character, carried through their tasks with zeal and devotion. "The smiths," as Ten Brink says, "or whatever similar craftsmen performed at the play of the Crucifixion would make it a point of honour to affix the Saviour on the cross in a workman-like way, and thus the details of their trade with all its difficulties and accidents, came to terrible application on such momentous occasions, and gave to the accompanying dialogue the crudest, and—in a technical as well as in a philosophical sense—the most illusive life."

Nor would a laboured inquisition have discovered elsewhere a better, a more dramatic plot, of greater tension, or more highly charged with significance, than unfolded itself in the mediæval rendering of Scripture—the Creation and Fall of Man, the transterranean abyss,

> "With dreadful faces throng'd and fiery arms"—

the fallen Lucifer and his angels arrayed against God's throne and sovereignty, the expulsion from Paradise, the sequent and calamitous history of the disinherited human race, the Flood with its attend-

ant horrors, the bondage of the chosen people in Egypt, the procession of the Prophets, the Nativity and the angels' message to the Shepherds, the slaughter of the Innocents, Christ's entry into Jerusalem, his Betrayal and Crucifixion, the Resurrection, Doomsday. In such pictures the man of the middle ages found his cosmology and religion. He found his poetry in scenes like that of Abraham about to sacrifice his son Isaac, of Mary nursing the infant Saviour, the simple shepherds offering their gifts ; his comedy in the domestic relations between Noah and his wife ; his tragedy in many a heart-shaking scene till it culminated in the last Judgment and the fate of the wicked. It is difficult to believe that Shakespeare and his fellows gained by rejection of all this for Italian romance and Roman history, or that the Elizabethan drama, with its more sophisticated art, came home with a power upon its audiences equal to the power of these clumsy, simple-hearted, realistic presentations of the Bible story.

IX. MARLOWE AND SHAKESPEARE

Yet while the world endures the tragic artist need but look around to find his subjects. Genius may be, indeed often is, wanting, a generation may be wanting which welcomes tragedy, never material for it. And Shakespeare's praise is the greater that in histories uncharged with the solemnity of religious tradition, of less weight, less gloom and grandeur than those of Æschylus, he rose—shall we say ?—to a parallel height. Thus though the Greeks were taken up with loftier themes, with man's cosmic attachments, his relation to the gods and the eternal laws, the moderns with the human plot and human entanglements, sublunary rather than translunary things, tragedy in Shakespeare's hands lost little of its proper dignity. It is the office of the imagination to tell the truth, to present life therefore as a thing of unplumbed significance, and so in *Hamlet* and in *Lear* the Elizabethan must have felt it, subtler, vaster, more mysterious than he had guessed. Spurred, like his predecessor in the miracle plays, to new reflections he made a discovery of himself upon the stage, his portrait painted, as da Vinci advised, *under a troubled sky*. He saw himself an inhabitant of the world with all its holy wonders, bound on

an amazing voyage, touched with strange desires, buoyed by obscure hopes, caught into webs of far-reaching speculations, a citizen of worlds unrealized. The Romantic is, none the less, a secular drama. Marlowe, its first great name, proclaiming and exulting in his freedom, shook himself free from all the lingering religious and moral entanglements of the Miracle and Morality, already in shadow. Supported by divine genius, the incarnation, it is hardly too strong a word, of Elizabethan England, supported by its spirit of enterprise, adventure, daring, a glorious spirit, he chose heroic subjects, avoiding thus realism, the ruin of tragedy, and achieved— ? magnificent melodrama. Melodrama saved, alas ! only from absurdity by flashes of enchanting poetry. Driven out of his course by contrary winds there his voyage ended. Shakespeare, too, avoiding what later playwrights deliberately sought, a representation of actual life, preserved the noble earnestness, too often lacking in Marlowe, the only foundation upon which tragedy has ever been built or can be built. But examine the *Oresteia, probably on the whole the greatest spiritual work of man*, and *Hamlet* where the situations are not unlike, and the essential contrast between classic and romantic tragedy is revealed. "Shakespeare has turned from the discussion of great world problems to personal and psychological interests." The inward and the outward mystery of mind and

universe remain, but Fortune, a pale, conventional Deity, has with him usurped the throne of Zeus; and where for Æschylus, at home with gods and men, refusing or unable to narrow life to the merely visible and temporary, to tear it out of its context, the march of outward events had significance only in its cosmic frame, where, for him, Nature, seen and unseen, constituted a living unity not to be split asunder; for Shakespeare this our earth is without attachments; his peopled but lonely planet swings, as if unrelated to any other, in empty space. It was his easier, but less fortunate, lot to find imagination anchored to earth, diminished in dignity, and thus, to the wonder of succeeding generations, he appears himself without religion, blind or indifferent to the larger questions and issues, the continuity and the whole of things. He essays no ocean voyage, nor sails, as has been well said, beyond the Pillars of Hercules. In Romantic drama, in Shakespeare's even, our thoughts remain below, are confessedly earthbound and mundane—Macbeth's ambition, Hamlet's delay, Anthony's folly. The Greek, despite his love of intellectual precision—or, rather, should we not say on account of it?—refused to regard human life as an independent kingdom; regarded it as a village within a state, a city or territory only on the map of the universe, whose political and moral government, therefore, was for him a matter of intimate and immediate concern. Hence the

stature of his tragic heroes, who "act and suffer," said Hazlitt, "as if they were always in the presence of a higher power, or as if human life itself were a religious ceremony, performed in honour of the gods and of the state." For man, the Greeks perceived, was built into the structure of the world. From the world he had emerged, nothing could be found in him that was not there before him, in the yesterday before his to-day, the sense of justice, of duty, or any other sense—how else could it have reached him ?

> "A seed there must have been upon the spot
> Where the flowers grow——"

His thoughts, his feelings, his acts had their springs in the invisible. Was it Aphrodite or Hera or Ares ? When he loved, the strong goddess of love constrained him, Apollo prompted his ambition or Zeus put vengeance in his thought. We speak another, a disillusioned and less vivid language, yet have nothing on which to congratulate ourselves. Omit the personification, and in the last analysis we are little the wiser, back once more at the beginning. The Greek symbols for the inexpressible are still the loveliest. To compass the eternal and infinite in terms of space and time is far from easy, hence all great art is rare, for that is its incredible undertaking. In brief, say what you will, without this *infinitude of background* tragedy fades to a shadow of

its greater self, dwindles to a sorrowful tale, no more. Life is certainly difficult to understand, but —let us admit the truth—for its better comprehension to tear the page, however unintelligible, out of the book to which it belongs is a mere counsel of despair. And later, when the forensic understanding, the dry restrictive spirit, rejected themes beyond its own immediate scope and so triumphed over the imagination, it cannot be said with truth that all was lost, nothing gained; but for some reason the triumph coincided with the death of tragedy.

X. FATE OR OURSELVES?

Approach ancient and modern from another angle. What we expect of the epic hero is an eminent superiority, that he shall rise to all occasions, prove equal to all encounters. In romance no peril too great, no adventure too hazardous, no giant or dragon too strong for him. In tragedy, on the other hand, and in comedy also, we are witnesses of defeat. For to escape the tragic or the comic shaft a master of the situation is required. To be unequal to the circumstances, to be overpowered by them, to fail is, however, in tragedy to die; in comedy, by comparison a Lilliput of lesser creatures, a parody, as it were, of the greater art, to become merely the target of derision. Contrast then ours with Hellenic tragedy:

> Not with the Martyrs, and Saints, and Confessors, and Virgins, and children,
> But with the mightier forms of an older, austerer worship—".

In theirs the unchanging background of human life rises like an overhanging cliff, a cliff from which at any moment a vast fragment may detach itself to descend upon the habitations of men; such a fragment as in the late war crashed into innumerable amazed and innocent homes, or in the earthquake

at Tokio overwhelmed a terror-stricken capital. Or we may say that above the present leans the lofty and invincible shade of what has been, determining what shall be. Or, again, that all hangs upon situation, the web of circumstances so charged with significance that either way out leads to crisis, and we watch to see from what quarter of the sky the storm will burst. In this drama the stress lies upon the incurable weakness of humanity itself, condemned of necessity

> Against unequal arms to fight in pain.

Neither bodily nor mental dexterity on that Scironian road of the Greeks, neither goodness nor the best intentions avail. The hero may follow his brightest star,—Antigone the call of sacred duty, Hippolytus the call of chastity, and go down to destruction. *All were persuaded,* says Plutarch, *that the intentions of Brutus were good.* For that sombre picture of the world our drama has little liking. Shrinking, it may be, from so discouraging, so dark a vision of the immensity of the universe and our brittle state therein, of that sea without coast of our ignorance, it substitutes a thought less absolute ; not the great, general, and irremediable weakness of humanity amid awful powers and forms, or caught into the net of events stitched in the controlling though forgotten past, but the particular frailty of a particular man, some error or folly or disease in one not

shared by all. Thus modern tragedy insulates and makes more of character; with this implication, that helpless we are not altogether helpless, that another, wiser or better or stronger than the defeated hero, might have met and sustained the hour and the shock—a more sagacious Brutus, a wiser Othello, a saner Lear. So, sweetening the unpalatable draught, it presents our stage, the world, as in some measure at least intelligible, as a place in which virtue and foresight, knowledge, wisdom, and experience may guide our steps and even shield us from the worst. We do not always know what is right, but it is wonderful how often we do! Some power there is "sweetly and strongly ordering all things," to whose dispensations virtue and wisdom appear to lend a clue. Let us cease, then, to excuse ourselves, to arraign Fate, Fortune, or Planetary influence, *to make guilty of our disasters the sun, moon, and stars*, to conclude that we are more sinned against than sinning, and look within. Perhaps we should make the error of our ways answerable for our afflictions. A tragic plot may assuredly be built on this foundation, the principle of personal responsibility or contributary negligence. There are critics simple enough to make Shakespeare the unceasing exponent of this so much pleasanter creed. Yet if your conclusion be that the victim of calamity, always and in fact, sets fire to his own dwelling, or at least supplies the flint and steel, though life is

wonderfully simplified by your discovery, and the human plot robbed of its mystery, tragedy declines to a morality, a seamark on some dangerous reef, jealousy, or pride, or ambition. Learn navigation, then, keep a good look out, take constant soundings and banish your fears. With this wisdom and those unwearied preachers, who, like Gervinus, think of tragedy as the realm of moral failures, of Shakespeare's heroes as all the *dupes of folly or the slaves of crime*, who find the world a perfect mirror of justice, of things disposed in the best possible manner, whose platitudes, vexing the air, echo continually through the sublime cathedral of his thought, we may, without further ado, shake hands and part. The *instinct or tendency of the mind upward*, as Berkeley has it, is poor human nature's best and, indeed, only guide, a lighthouse for the soul's voyage; what else can we do than argue for the thesis of responsibility, proclaim our power and not our weakness? Yet we must resist those who would take advantage of our natural dulness. Faith at the best implies lack of knowledge, and the most exalted hope an uncertain issue. Tragedy of whatever type, to remain tragedy, must refuse to make all things plain, must prostrate itself before the unknown, nor presume with the sentimentalists lightly to interpret the hieroglyphics of destiny.

XI. CHARACTER AND DESTINY

We approach now a parting of the ways and a vital issue. How far is the bond between destiny and character preserved in tragedy, ancient or modern, and how far does the tragic interest depend upon that bond ? A false step is here easy, and its results fatal to a true understanding. Observe, first, this is not precisely the familiar problem of the *blameless hero*, to be examined later, but of some *nexus* between his acts and fate—a *nexus* or link, which may be his very blamelessness, his virtue or nobility itself. *Dilexi justitiam et odi iniquitatem, propterea morior in exsilio* were the dying words of Hildebrand. " All vainly I reverenced God, and in vain unto man was I just." [1] If history is to be trusted, his very virtues may bring a man down, his magnanimity prove his ruin, his honesty his bane. Aristides was expelled from Athens for his justice, Myrsine, the Attic maid, murdered by her companions because she excelled the rest in beauty. Instances like these can be matched from any man's experience, and in these is perhaps tragic matter enough. But postpone that question. Here is at least the required link between the person and his fate. Unpleasant, but we understand it. In life

[1] Euripides—*Hippolytus*, 1365—1369.

we know, however, there is often no such link, often in its place a mere gap appears, a senseless gulf, a sheer baffling irrelevance, repulsive to the mind. *Man*, said Herodotus, *is all accident*. The Lisbon earthquake, which searched his heart and put Goethe to such uneasiness, made no discriminating choice, no distinction among its victims. What then ? It may not be the rule of nature or of life, you say, to consider the acts or characters of men in their dealings with them, yet it is assuredly none the less the rule of tragedy. We must distinguish ; the disastrous and the tragic are not the same. Meaningless events whose causes we cannot trace, contingencies we cannot fit into any intelligible frame of things, occurrences out of all relation to human conduct, can have no place in art. In art, if not elsewhere, the demands of the intellect must be met ; there, or our proper satisfaction is denied us, we require situations the logic of which is apparent. This fortress, you think, must at all cost be defended. You allow, probably, that the bond, if bond between character and destiny there be, is never sought, nor could if sought be readily found among the minor sufferers, if we may call them minor, the victims drawn into the vortex, drowned in the eddies of the protagonist's sinking ship, in whose navigation they have had no share—Hecuba, Andromache, the Fool in *Lear*, Cleopatra's maids, Charmian and Iras, Titinius in *Julius Cæsar*. They are superfluous

persons, do not give their title to the piece, and need not detain us. Of some consequence to themselves, they are of none to the theory. Our eyes are fixed upon the central figures, and for them it holds. You claim, then, that there are regions of human experience in which, for all the pain and sadness to be found in them, the tragic artist takes little interest, from which, by its own law, tragedy is excluded. You banish from its view the realm of chance, of accident, of incalculable happenings. You believe, for example, that it was beyond the power of Sophocles to make a great and moving tragedy upon such a subject as *Sohrab and Rustum.* You maintain, too, that when Iago crossed Desdemona's path "None but herself did she meet on the high road of fate;" you argue that the ruin or misery of others by a man's actions is not a tragic theme, only his own ruin. If he escape evil consequences or reap success and honour, the rest may be neglected. No one can well be blamed for his preference of the intelligible to the obscure, a defensible prejudice whether in art or philosophy. We prefer sense from men, our neighbours, in all their words and works; but have we a right to require it of the nature of things, *our sense*, to require that it shall satisfy our modes of comprehension? You reply once more, "We are speaking of art, not nature." Yet poetry, an art, is in some measure a study of nature and her ways, and it seems unlikely that by averting our

gaze from her singular dealings with us we shall come to understand them better. The realm of the intelligible cannot very well be widened save by a study of its opposite—the route by which science advances to its victories. If you remain unconvinced by this argument, still further difficulties await you. Tragedy, some weighty and eloquent authorities hold, so far from avoiding the incalculable, the inexplicable, has its roots there, flourishes only in this rocky soil and withers if transplanted. Schopenhauer was of opinion that *the representation of a great misfortune is alone essential to tragedy*, and that blind Fate might be the agent of it. Shelley argued that *even crime*, in the Athenian drama, *is disarmed of half its horror and all its contagion by being represented as the fatal consequence of the unfathomable agencies of nature.* Nietzsche, who held tragedy to be *the dancing ground of divine accident*, censures Euripides for his anti-Dionysian spirit, which transferred attention from that unfathomableness to *character representation.* The point is of interest, and in part explains the modern attraction to Euripides; a thinker who, like some of our own, found neither earth nor heaven, neither men nor gods to his mind, who with axe and hammer laid the Greek Pantheon in ruins, placing within the frame of the accepted legend his critical commentary, his ironical notes, which might be read either as acceptance or rejection, an intellectual banquet for

the wits of Athens. In Euripides, Nietzsche discovered a victim of the Socratic optimism and dialectic. Everything was to be brought to the bar of intellect and made clear. "Virtue is knowledge; man only sins from ignorance; he who is virtuous is happy. These three fundamental forms of optimism involve the death of tragedy." This poet of æsthetic Socratism, the non-mystic Euripides, unable to endure the incomprehensible, demanded what was *intelligible to him*, conceived that his thought was the measure of reality, and making the chorus, the very soul of ancient drama, a mere superfluity, drove out music, the symbol of the incomprehensible nature of things, so that tragedy with him took *the death leap into the bourgeois drama.* Milton, too, for all his faith in the divine government of the world, allowed to Fortune, *a power beneath the moon*, dominion over mortals and makes the lofty, grave tragedians of the classic stage treat

"Of fate, and chance, and change in human life."

And Dante, in that strange passage of the *Inferno*, assigns to her capricious deity a place in the Creator's scheme. "This fortune, of whom thou speakest," he asks his guide, "who is she," and is answered that Transcendent Wisdom has ordained her place, with power to change the possession of life's vanities from race to race, from family to family. *Beyond human knowledge are her ways, her permutations cease*

not. Yet though reviled and of ill repute, she hears not, but with the primal creatures turns her sphere, and is in bliss.

> "Con l'altre prime creature lieta
> Volve sua spera, e beata si gode."

Still with these interpreters you may disagree, and urge us to acknowledge that where the evil comes from without, arises out of fate, accident, or chance, there is a *kind of evaporation of grief* or mitigation of distress, and room, too, for *expostulation against the divine powers.* The essentially tragic thing, the argument runs, is to be the victim of one's own act, the author of one's proper woe, to bring misery upon ourselves or upon those we love ; that, in brief, unless the catastrophe be somehow connected with or hinge upon the deeds of the sufferer, we must not call it true tragedy. It is Bacon's reasoning. *The sting and remorse of the mind accusing itself doubleth all adversity, and where the evil is derived from a man's own folly all striketh inwards and suffocateth.* "So the poets in tragedy," he concludes, "do make the most passionate lamentations and those that forerun final despair by accusing, questioning, and torturing of a man's self." In this type of drama the hero turns upon himself, admits a vast miscalculation, perceives his folly, and dies, it may be, penitent, remorseful like Othello, or like Macbeth, still defiant, a death to fill

spectators with pity and horror, and provide withal a moral lesson worth the learning. And if we were our own creators, and all *in nostra potestate* there could be no other type. *But all within our own power!* How large an assumption, and in life, at least, how wide of the truth. If, however, you continue to appeal from life as it has been and will be, from nature and her dealings with us to art, then the tragedians themselves constitute the final court, since it is their landscape we desire to study; for the moment the voice neither of religion nor morals but of poetry speaking through tragedy that we desire to hear, its reading of the crabbed manuscript of things. On this issue obscurity there is none. Whatever the critics may require, the rule of life is in poetry the rule of art.

The many who think of poetry as the mere voice of feeling, of the language it employs as hyperbolic and fanciful and of its makers, the reputed slaves of the imagination, as sentimentalists, of all guides, therefore, the least trustworthy, are deceived. The poets are the safest guides.

> "The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
> Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes."

The poets of account are miracles of brain, of swift and searching intelligence, of unwinking accuracy in observation. Aristophanes in *The Frogs*, Dante in the *Divine Comedy*, Chaucer in the *Prologue*, Brown-

ing in the *Ring and the Book* are not men asleep and dreaming, but of comprehension, discernment, intellect above the common pitch, men preternaturally alive and awake among their slumbering companions. So, too, Æschylus and Shakespeare. For this reason and no other we desire their judgments upon the meaning and value of existence; for this reason even philosophers are found among their pupils—Socrates in the theatre when Euripides is staged there. The tragic poets standing on a firm foundation—the facts of life—never deceive themselves and are never deceived. What they find they report. If they know

> "how chances mock
> And changes fill the cup of alteration
> With divers liquors;"

if it be humanity's experience that fate, fortune, chance, accident, the incalculable element, call it by what name you prefer, takes a hand in the game and often plays a dishonest and determining card; if the words themselves in every language attest that experience—well, though often done, it remains a folly to insist that where there is darkness there is light, and something of a presumption to become in their own art the instructors of Euripides and of Shakespeare.

XII. THE ATTIC DRAMA

Fate, Fortune, Destiny—to go in and out among these conceptions falls to the lot of most writers on tragedy and is commonly a tedious and unprofitable pilgrimage. Yet something may possibly be gained if, fetching a compass, we approach them by way of the origins of Hellenic drama, and the problems to which it addressed itself in the strong hands of the Greeks, "of whom to learn at all is," as Nietzsche said, "in itself a high honour and a rare distinction."

For all the trouble we take over them how little light origins give us—the origins of language, for example, on Virgil and Dante, or the nebular hypothesis on the world in which we live. And were we wholly without knowledge of the beginnings either of classical or romantic tragedy, our appreciation of Sophocles or of Shakespeare would, it may be confessed, suffer little hurt. Of these beginnings scholarship has told us something, but to the most sapient eye the acorn hardly foretells the oak. Nor will it be anywhere argued that Thespis and his village choir in Greece, or the liturgical drama in England, gave clear promise of what was to come. To Æschylus, the first of the three mighty ones, what a stride! The infant has become a Titan.

Still to inquire for origins is a warrantable, even praiseworthy, curiosity and the conclusion a safe one, that tragedy first arose in association with some religious rite, performed at the grave of a dead hero or the altar of a living god—a rite which acknowledged the influence of the unseen upon the seen, never at any time lost sight of by the Greeks; the power, some say, of the mysterious agents behind the wheeling year, which bring corn and oil in their season, and rule by their cyclic spells the lives and fortunes of men. And Dionysus? Well, if he were not, as certain scholars suppose, an usurper here, he seems to stand for the hidden fire in nature, the law, or principle or rhythm of existence, the ebb and flow, the waxing and waning, the fading and blossoming again, the birth and rebirth of all living things. The dance or hymn was there—his or another's—the primitive ritual inseparable from all early religion. What turn, what steps were needed to arrive at the heights of tragedy? We look back, and behind the Greeks of the sixth century lies the broad heroic plain, the epic age, the world of Homer perceived by them as by us in clear-shining, calm perfection; for the needs of that time final, sufficient, unquestioned, a planet immense, brilliant, but motionless. And time moved on, and with time came change, which is, indeed, but time's other name, and with it came the need for a new setting, a new expression for

thoughts suited to an age no longer epic. And somehow, by a process hardly to be described, the old stories of the race, their Bible history, as one might call it, entered into an alliance with a ritual as old or older than the tales themselves, the art and world of Homer with that other art and world of dance and sacred hymn. The *lovely song of Dionysus* was miraculously wedded to an ancient tale, and fortunate as ever the Greeks found once more a matchless mould for the acuter thoughts, the wider speculations, the emotions arising out of the more complex relationships of their maturer age.

What eternally fascinates us in Greece is, to say all in a word, the emergence there of mind, suddenly, like a figure shining and in full armour, such as Spenser might have imagined, from the Forest of Unreason. Veiled with exceeding art as ancient savagery is in Homer, behind him in that forest lurk the grim shapes of the aboriginal horror, the superstitions, the sorceries, the human sacrifices, the *washing out of mud with mud*, in the phrase of Heraclitus—and for gods, beings more powerful indeed, but not less cruel, lustful, jealous, vindictive than their worshippers. In Greece on this primeval darkness the dawn rises, in Greece and for the world. There, broad awake, the mind first examined the very base of things, the roots of being, justice, law, conscience, duty—not omitting the Olympians

themselves from the account. With what pride Lucretius relates it.

> Humana ante oculos fœde cum vita jaceret
> in terris oppressa gravi sub religione
> quæ caput a cæli regionibus ostendebat
> horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans,
> primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra
> est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra,
> quem neque fama deum nec fulmina nec minitanti
> murmure compressit cælum, sed eo magis acrem
> inritat animi virtutem, effringere ut arta
> naturæ primus portarum claustra cupiret.
> ergo vivida vis animi pervicit, et extra
> processit longe flammantia mœnia mundi
> atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque—[1]
> (Book I, 62–74).

Imagine the stage prepared then, imagine the hymn, the dance, the declamation by the leader of the choir, and behind them that Homeric throng of gods and demigods and heroes, awaiting the poet's summons to take their places; presenting, one group

[1] "When human life to view lay foully prostrate upon earth crushed down under the weight of religion, who shewed her head from the quarters of heaven with hideous aspect lowering upon mortals, a man of Greece ventured first to lift up his mortal eyes to her face and first to withstand her to her face. Him neither story of gods nor thunder-bolts nor heaven with threatening roar could quell, but only stirred up the more the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the fast bars of nature's portals. Therefore the living force of his soul gained the day; on he passed far beyond the flaming walls of the world and traversed throughout in mind and spirit the immeasurable universe."—Translation of *De Rerum Natura*, by H. A. J. Munro.

or another, in actual instances from familiar myths, with firm impressive distinctness, all experiences, circumstances, crises, lots and fortunes held in the memory of the race; concrete examples or embodiments of insistent human problems not to be evaded, inviting or compelling thought on issue after issue, problems arising out of the social partnership, the dealings of men with men, and the working of those still more mysterious wills, the powers above—the sudden apparition, one might say, of the universe to consciousness, its immensity, its might, its doubtful purposes. The spirit of inquiry meets the spirit of poetry and tragedy is born.

XIII. THE CHORUS IN GREEK DRAMA

The corner stone of this tragedy, too, the chorus, what a thing it is! Dismiss all other evidences of Greek genius in art, they are needless. Inspiration declares itself here and the spirit of Hellas stands embodied before us, not so much to be reasoned over as marvelled at. The most dazzling, one sometimes thinks, of human inventions, wherein poetry absolutely reveals her nature and her power. How strange, and not a little to the credit of our own age, the discredit of the Augustans, those disciples and imitators of the ancients, that we and not they discerned its supreme excellence. "It could only be," thought Dr. Johnson, "by long prejudice and the bigotry of learning that Milton could prefer the ancient tragedies with their encumbrance of a chorus to the exhibitions of the French and English stages." Thus, and how often, the infirmity of our reason debars us from happiness. For in this matter there is nothing cryptic, nor is any wealth of scholarship needed to perceive that unless approached by way of the chorus, its germ, the root of its being, Greek drama is shorn of half its wonder and most of its significance. The chorus is there for wonder's sake and meaning's sake, to

exalt our emotion and enrich our thought. A paradox, perhaps, for the modern mind, it is there primarily as a deliberate sentry against realism, to exclude verisimilitude, to forbid the illusion that we are witnessing a scene from real life. For that we are not to look. The chorus is there as a plain symbol of the opposite intention. This band of singers—who employed an archaic dialect, who were remotely connected with the persons on the stage, were neither sharers in the action nor yet spectators only, witnesses who were present at the most private interviews, knew all and might have interfered at the most critical moments yet did not, observers who embroidered the text of the action with a running commentary, or interrupted it by lyrical outbursts—seems at first sight a fantastic irrelevancy. With the later tragedians, indeed, it became so. They took the downward path to the valley of realism. The chorus which was at first everything came at last to be nothing. But the Greeks of the great age understood the marvel, and when to the anapæstic march the singers entered, they drew all eyes and concentrated all emotions. Grouped there around the altar, within and yet without the play, the chorus made of actors and spectators a living unity, and so swept the audience, of which it formed the speaking portion, into the moving tide of the high stage events. Thus the whole crowded theatre became

itself the gathering of a sympathetic clan or tribe around the doors of its chieftain's house at some crisis of his fate or fortune, which was not his alone but theirs. In such a single-minded assembly to lead, interpret, harmonize, intensify emotion, as an orator might, was easy, to utter the unspoken or shape the half-formed thought. To these tasks it was bent and fulfilled them ; those minor duties also, to bind the scenes together and yet act as a dividing curtain, or in place of the soliloquy to receive the confidences of an actor intent upon some secret purpose. Yet beyond and above these, in its highest and lyrical moods, it invested the action with a fresh and unutterable significance and enveloped the mind in a mist of loveliness. At those moments of extremity when the heart was rent or the reason outraged, when from the scene before the spectators proceeded nothing but misery and bewilderment, when life's tangle seemed a knot past all unravelling, it drew aside the obscuring curtain of their confined and mundane thoughts, they became *the friends and companions of the images of wonder ;* beauty, the eternal and indubitable, irradiated the confused and temporal, and at the last, when the storm had burst, spanned the sky like a rainbow, an iridescent arc of light—unsubstantial, inconclusive—satisfying, wonderful.

XIV. THE MESSENGER

This drama is naturally austere and even cold for those who, whatever their scholarship, lack imagination or overlook its historical frame. Consider, for example, the messenger, a figure for us dull and colourless, without interest and without associations; for the Greeks—always and probably even more than most ancient communities, on the hazardous edge of existence, exposed to sudden and destructive storms of violence—the absolute centre of everything momentous and dramatic in their lives. Battles, invasions, sieges, pirate raids, common events in their experience, carried with them real and immediate consequences: it might easily be massacre, it might well be slavery. A hot-foot runner who brings word of such things will be at all times of importance, and, if expected, a man awaited with no trifling anxiety. Carry yourself to Athens on the day of Marathon. All hangs upon the issue, which, if unfavourable, means for its citizens the end of the world. Imagine the fluctuations of hope and fear, heightening as the messenger is seen at a distance, draws near and has breath for no more than—*χαίρετε νικῶμεν*! Imagine the resurgence of emotion from desperate doubts to a delirium of

relief and pride. Or picture to yourself the arrival of the news from Syracuse that there all was indeed lost, when Athens was "overwhelmed," as Thucydides tells us, "by the calamity, in fear and consternation unutterable." No figure in modern life is or could be identified with such poignant experiences, and, habitually associated with them, the message-bearer became for the Greeks a kinsman or minister of fate.

XV. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

"Diminish evil," remarks Nietzsche cynically, "and it will go hard with the tragic poets." It is, of course, the obvious and simple truth. Scrutinize the motives of tragedy, ancient or modern, and you find embedded in them the fundamental problem of all religions, the problem of evil. That old dragon rears one of its hydra heads in every tragedy. Armed with this and that dialectical weapon, one theory or another, the champions of the race, theologians and philosophers, have gone out against the monster, but with no conspicuous success. In the phrase of Job, "he counteth iron as straw and brass as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee, sling stones are turned with him into stubble." Yet unable at any epoch of his history—it is a mystery of nature—to accommodate himself to a merely senseless world, for all mischances and misadventures, for all the discords man must somehow find a cause. Superb confidence in reason! So curiously is he fashioned that this inner and imperious demand brooks no evasion. An unintelligible world, an irrational order—to out-run that intellectual horror, *monstrum horrendum, informe*, the early philosopher, like his later

representatives, tried many avenues. And such is the invincible elasticity of thought, forever turning and returning upon itself, that retracing the turbid stream of history, find what you may, you will find no generation without its own reading of the dark cipher, some attempt at interpretation, however rustic, of events however unaccountable; though in our eyes possibly no more than pathetic errors, children's guesses at what lay behind *the dark, unfathomable mind of Zeus.* The origin of evil—with that problem tragedy is obviously associated ; with another, too, no less troublesome—the problem of conduct. And thus Hellenic drama may well be called an observatory, the earliest, whence the whole firmament of moral and religious inquiry opens to our gaze, like the starry heavens themselves, an amazing and arresting spectacle.

The pleasure of the story is with Homer, as all his readers know, the chief matter; a pleasure kept bright and burnished by every species of narrative skill. And how charmingly untroubled he is by theological difficulties ! He wears an unclouded brow, is at ease with all the gods, acquiesces in the myths as a farmer in the seasons, not asking why rain falls or winds blow. But with the sun of reason high in the heavens, though Homer and the myths remain, all else is changed. And if, recalling Æschylus' description of his own works as *morsels from the feast of Homer*, you attenuate this drama

to a mirror of heroic life, or describe it as a restitching of old stories for the stage, you forget its origin. You forget that other strand of a religious ritual with its accompanying music. The chorus, the almost stationary figures, the high boot, the flowing robes, the solemn gesture, the sustained recitative forbid the suggestion that it presents an affair of agora or palace, a pathetic and moving history taken from life. The formality of structure, the balance in the choric odes between strophe and antistrophe forbid it. This is not a form of art which aims at pleasant narrative, or proposes to entertain spectators by a presentation of character. Far otherwise. This is a form moulded upon an ancient rite and adapted by Hellenic genius to quite other ends. Its authors were, in truth, not so much providers of pleasure as they were theologians, philosophers, moralists, for whom the drama was, as religion to Goethe, *a kind of sacred vessel*, into which they poured their understandings, their imaginations, the decrees and promptings of their souls. The Greek drama is a soaring fabric, an astonishment by reason of its wealth of poetry, no doubt, but not less because the riddle of the world is there thrown into high relief by its embodiment in human situations; and hence, since the tragic spectacle speaks more eloquently than logic, with unsurpassed appealing and afflicting power. Though its features hardly differed—the miseries and mis-

fortunes of men are much alike in all ages—we are not to suppose that the riddle wore for the Greeks the exact expression it wears for us. Æschylus had many anxieties which time has dispelled and a racial background to his thoughts now unfamiliar, as when, in *The Suppliants*, the marriage of children of the same father but not of the same mother, an ancient Athenian usage and matriarchal custom, is apparently in question. Disquieting enigmas of the mind now at rest were still in the balance, causes of which in that age neither men nor gods could lightly judge ; that for instance of the old blood feuds between families, the ancient wild equity of an eye for an eye, a life for a life, or of vengeance, at once righteous and unrighteous, within the family itself, such as brought to destruction Agamemnon's house, shaken to its fall by Heaven. Such ancient problems apart, however, this drama enchains attention for two reasons above all others, that it lays bare to the last stone the foundations of human society, and presents with equal and unsparing directness, in its naked verity, man's place within his mysterious dwelling, the un-riddled universe. It asks with manly resolution and yet as with a child's pathetic, unwavering persistence what laws and whose are man's legitimate, what affections and sympathies his natural rulers ? And again, what from the invisible and unknown he has to fear or may hope for, in what quarter of

the heavens to look for consolatory or guiding stars.

Thus, to our wonder, those intellectual architects, the Greeks, gave to the vital problems of the world, as they gave to their temples, a definitive and enduring form. They first questioned the Sphinx, nor has the busy brain of the world since framed the questions with the same simplicity and directness, so unobscured by the passions of hostile sects and jarring creeds, so high above priestly opposition and political entanglements. They took a thousand shapes, the early riddles. Above the horizon of the tragedians rose thoughts unknown to their ancestors a century back—the rights of captives, of slaves, of women, the sanctity of an oath. Whence, for example, this uneasiness felt by the victor about to slay his prisoners, whose legal right over them no man questioned? And whence the claims of a seemingly higher justice, of honesty, truth, decency, humanity, the inner checks and promptings of the heart and conscience, strange new lights in the moral Heavens? And other matters besides these, harder still to weigh in reason's scale, the doings of the Olympians challenged the judgment; the rule or misrule of the gods, the vindictive spite, it might be, of Artemis, the deceptions of Apollo, the amours of Zeus himself, of which tradition told, their inhuman handling, too, of human things and creatures, as with the blind Œdipus, ensnared by

fate, Philoctetes abandoned to misery to serve divine ends, or Phædra victimized by Aphrodite. And of all things most marvellous, the double aspect of this universe of ours, its enchanting and forbidding features—these inconsolable hearts, these pitiful calamities, death itself, in a world bathed in natural splendours, so fair that the heart ached with its loveliness, a world of pain in the embrace of the divine and stainless æther. Of this illimitable estate tragedy in Athens took possession. Poetry is *the most ancient of all learnings*, and it were an injustice to think of the Greek tragedians as poets only, who, in this twilight of religion and thought, were not less astronomers, watchers of the mind, its intricate motions and events, and early masters in a knowledge not yet outgrown, and since their time little advanced by comparison with that of the sidereal, *substantial, and telescopic heavens*.

How bewildered would be his hearers were a man of our time to speak of tragedy as a part of religion and a bond of the state. Yet for the Greeks it was both. During its performance the theatre was literally the temple of Dionysus, the great middle throne in the auditorium occupied by his priest. The daily bargainings, the discussions and disputes of mercantile and civic life were there silenced, the forces of faction, of personal and petty interests, if not forgotten, at least, as during that other period of truce the Olympic festival, overruled by a higher

force and more compelling interest. The ideas and emotions which unite, rather than the arguments which divide, men are indeed the staple of poetry. And this, a poetical drama, induced in its auditors not merely a sympathy with each other, which doubtless it may be claimed with truth modern drama also induces, but a sympathy with greatness which it does not induce. The majesty and the mystery of life, with which our stage has no dealings, were there displayed, and the benefits of social union, above all of that Hellenic society to which the spectators themselves belonged, with its common speech and tutelary gods, exalted as a federation of divine origin, divinely upheld.

To ponder such scenes as Æschylus and his successors presented—the dealings of Zeus with the friend of man, Prometheus, the ways of the human heart when wronged, like Medea's, the fate of Antigone brought low by sisterly affection—was for its spectators, the keenest intelligences, be it remembered, the most exacting critics, the best judges of poetry, and the most ardent lovers of beauty the theatre has ever known, at once a mental probe and purificatory rite, a searching medicine and an elixir of priceless fragrance. Tragedy, one sees, was more to them than to us, who have lowered our demands upon it, care less for beauty, have a livelier faith in science than in poetry and travel by other routes to our unanswer-

able problems. The world, too, has learnt self-control and no longer cries aloud its grief. Passionate utterance belongs to the primitive and buried past. And when suffering is silent, when neither word nor deed betrays the turmoil or the sorrow within, what place is left for the drama? If the heart breaks without outward sign, if woe is voiceless and tearless and no quiver of pain meets the observer's eye, when Stoic endurance has superseded the sob of the sufferer is there any longer place for the poet's pen or actor's art? Yet poetry is in its nature changeless, as changeless as its own creations. At a word

> "Hector and Ajax will be there again,
> Helen will come upon the wall to see."

And within its modern frame, also, isolated, delivered from the flux of things, there before us the passion of Lear, the terror of Faustus are arrested, *the wheel of Ixion stands still*; so that, if our fancy leads that way, at times in the spectacle of unmerited suffering like Desdemona's, at times in the form of a doubtful duty like Hamlet's, and in their company, we may

> "Shake our dispositions
> With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls."

XVI. ÆSCHYLUS

Whatever his political aims, and political aims he had, Æschylus is beyond all other dramatists a theologian, a man of God, turning always in thought back from earthly scenes and events to the primal and ultimate things, the beginnings, ends, and purposes of the world. We may call his, therefore, tragedy of the centre, the type or representative form, of which the rest are in a sense but variations, since man's place in the universe, his relation to God or Nature, is the axis round which all other matters revolve; all minor issues of action and character, his relation to his fellows, being as it were subsumed under that immense, inclusive and governing bond. The lesser and secular tragedies of ingratitude, revenge, ambition, of jealousy, mistaken judgment, thwarted affection reflect and derive, indeed, their poignancy from the pains and miseries of a disordered world, yet are concerned with a mere detail or fragment only of the larger theme—insinuating visitor into all our thoughts—are the gods hostile, friendly, or indifferent, are these, its griefs, mankind's bitter, irremediable and final portion? If this be true, one conclusion may at once be lifted out of

the region of debate, that only such exceptional and irreparable disaster however caused, by error or by fate, as startles us out of a dullard's acquiescence, searches our minds and forces us to review our Welt-anschauung, our conception of the world, is in the deepest sense, tragic. We are hardly, that is, in the neighbourhood of tragedy till we are forced to reflect and yet find our reflection fail us. A pathetic tale, a moving history which asks for a few natural and sympathetic tears, shed and soon forgotten, will not, nor again will a mere complaint against men and their doings, the evil they bring upon themselves, suffice ; a document, let us say, that censures persecution or denounces war by presenting to us their miserable accompaniments. Legitimate subjects enough, yet tragedy drops the plummet into a profounder gulf of disquietude. "While we are laughing," wrote Keats, "the seeds of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events—while we are laughing it sprouts, it grows, and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck." The tragedy of character alone, of suffering traced to some obvious folly or frailty incident to human nature, tragedy thus ameliorated and made easy for us, in so far as it withdraws the mind from the contemplation of the inner mystery, is further from the centre than that which seems to display the workings of a great, incalculable, natural force; that

great Necessity, whatever it be, which brought us into being, governs us and removes us from the scene ; before which, as before the earthquake, the flood or the thunderbolt, the heart stands still.

XVII. THE AFFAIR WITH THE GODS

For what, to rid ourselves of obscurity, is common knowledge, what must all admit ? Well, then, that man stands in two relations, to the powers above, however they be styled, and to his fellow men, that he meets in life with circumstances over which he appears to have some control, with others again over which confessedly he has none. He has an affair with the gods and an affair with mortals. There are critics who, to serve their own speculative ends, restrict tragedy to the latter province, but the tragedians themselves are of a different mind. They would have us essay a longer cast and enlarge the arc of our reflections. Make what you can of man as a free and responsible agent, we may suppose them to say, insist that in his character lies his destiny, that nature is his tool-box and he the builder of his own house, yet have a respect for the facts. And of this in particular, that there is evil not of his making in the world, injustices, cruelties, tempests, diseases, for which, plead the cause of Providence with all the arguments you may, you cannot at least call man to account. This is his affair with the gods, where nature, circumstance, chance, fortune are the loftier powers. And in the affair with his fellows,

too, he is at work with instruments, needs, sympathies, desires, conceptions, again not of his own making, the modes, in fact, of feeling, willing, apprehension—the endowment native to him. "We are in our web, we spiders, and whatever we catch in it we catch nothing but what allows itself to be caught in our kind of web." Hence poetry calls in question the right of the creating powers to sit in judgment on their creation. Man, *created sick, commanded to be whole,* launched weak, unskilled, ignorant, upon a sea full of reefs and dangers, terribly limited in time as in knowledge, how idle to demand from him more than nature gave—to require either perfection of judgment or of temper; to expect from a creature seeking his necessary sustenance, fighting for life amid innumerable enemies, as in a tropical forest or amid polar ice, the bearing and conduct of an angel. Yet something may be required. In this undetermined or lower region, where nature seems to hold her hand, refrains from throwing into the scale her invincible sword, there is a force in man among other forces. He has powers if he will but exercise them, powers upon himself, upon his fellows and upon events in a fair and neutral field, and here no doubt resolution, wisdom, skill, have their rewards. *Surely he that is wise is profitable unto himself.*

Thus, then, the tragedians see the world as an affair, an engagement, an enterprise, always against

odds, always of doubtful issue. And whether to ascribe man's strange, embarrassed lot, as Newman's subtle and profound intellect ascribed it, to *some terrible, aboriginal calamity* or, with most men of our time, to the emergence of the human race through baser species from a remarkable primæval slime, a less dignified but not less hazardous hypothesis, is hardly poetry's concern. He may be a fallen angel or a risen brute; he is at least man in his own estate, lonely, unique, incomparable, mysterious; for himself, and therefore for poetry, the Alpha and the Omega of things. And to forget the conditions of his existence, to overlook the scene of which he forms a part, the stage on which he stands, and thus limit tragedy to the commerce of men with men, as if that were all, is indeed possible; but what may then be said is not yet half the truth, and alters nothing in the primal situation, which for all our thinking endures unchanged, to which every generation directs its intensest gaze; as might the dwellers in a valley ringed by unscaled and unscalable mountains, some wistfully, some indignantly, some hopefully, none unconcernedly.

"*Il y a peu de choses*," said Fontenelle, "*aussi difficiles et aussi dangereuses que le commerce des hommes.*" Yes, and how true it is; a commerce indeed, from which tragedy often enough springs, whose perils are the staple of our drama, perils of

which, however, the ancients were no less well aware than the moderns. Yet the deeper conflict, *the antagonism at the heart of the world*, as Nietzsche called it, the innermost of all perplexities because the foundation of all, the affair with the gods, is staged by them in myth and symbol in the *Prometheus*, the *Œdipus*, the *Ion*, as it has never since been staged; and that, by the neglect, the avoidance of that issue, by its secularization, by its self-imposed limitation, our drama has been strengthened or enriched, for that contention there appear to be no arguments.

XVIII. THE ÆSCHYLEAN COSMOLOGY

For Æschylus the thought of man's relations to the eternal powers governs all other thoughts, so that his chief concern is to accommodate the gods of Greece, Homer's gods, bright and beautiful certainly, but lacking in the spiritual graces, to her awakened moral sense. And of this aristocrat of the mind, moving always in its court circles, amid conceptions of the highest rank, it may be said, what can be said of no other dramatist, that he lifted Olympus itself upon his shoulders and added a cubit to the stature of Zeus. The gods are in his debt. Æschylus is above praise as he is beyond imitation, and not only speaks a language of his own, alive with metaphor, hieroglyphical, unique, unparalleled, which seems to borrow from nature something of her threatening magnificence, he alone among poets presents to the imagination the great problems of human life and destiny in adequate and intelligible symbols. He has, too, this singularity—he takes upon him without complaint, as part of the natural order, as a thing to be understood and accepted, the burden of human suffering. The truth is not easily concealed that, apparently indigenous to the soil of our planet, certainly rooted

there, is pain, a weed ineradicable ; that there is an unresolved dissonance within the universe, which popular imagination has always pictured as a conflict—between Ormuz and Ahriman, between God and Satan. By some poets it has been made a standpoint for painful contemplation and sad acceptance. It is with Æschylus rather a point of departure. No doubt man sets out on his voyage in the teeth of the gale, progresses only through toilsome effort, gains his victories at the cost of wounds.

"What, man ! ne'er pull your hat upon your brows."

Humanity is equal to so high, if so hard and strange a destiny. If Nature has launched man upon a sea of troubles she has at the same time given him strength to endure them. The sorrows of the world in the Æschylean conception appear to be less the result of sin and error than the inevitable accompaniments of a great assay, comparable to the pains and perils of the explorer or climber of a virgin peak. Men who are men delight in such undertakings and would not, if they could, forego so exalted an adventure as life, which, like many lesser endeavours, has, for those worthy to engage in it, a zest above banqueting, a recompense more than sufficient, a glory which mounts, as it were, upon the ladder of its attendant toils and griefs. And justice, righteousness, beauty ? Of these he will not let go the thought. Like know-

ledge, they are heirlooms, family jewels, the gifts to the race of earlier generations, hard-won and inalienable possessions. Sweetness, sentiment, peace, resignation some may ask for, but this is to have the grand manner, which pays without haggling the required price; a manner not less apparent, however, in the counter-claim against the gods for fair dealing, for a justice intelligible to men. This was Æschylus, soldier, philosopher, poet; as complete a man and far-darting a genius as ever walked in time. If he has his equal among poets he has no superior, and if there have been better dialecticians, I can recall none whose doctrine is more robust, or wears a greater dignity than his.

We are not to ask that he should be wholly clear in mind, and escape contradictions in a region where no thinker is clear or escapes them. Prometheus magnificently befriends man yet disobeys Zeus. Orestes acts as Apollo ordains, slays his mother, and is none the less haunted by the Furies. To heal such issues is beyond the wisdom of mortals. These are but variants of the old and familiar dilemma which presents itself in many shapes, of which it is now too late in history to expect a complacential and comfortable solution. In a world of manifest injustices man or Heaven must be at fault. "No one of the Hellenes in my time," says Thucydides of Nicias, "was less deserving of so miserable an end; for he lived in the practice of every virtue."

Or if it be Job stabbed by successive calamities who declares his innocence, he accuses God. If God be the fountain of justice, Job must somehow have offended.

How much less formidable would have been the task of the Greek tragedians had their Pantheon found room for a malignant Deity or *ἀντίθεος*, a Satan, "a personage," as Schopenhauer says, "of the greatest importance," to whom, as in the Christian Mysteries, the ills of humanity might have been ascribed. But there was none, and the shining hierarchy of Olympus shared among its members, to the mighty embarrassment of their pious worshippers, all responsibility for evil as for good. Hence the curious contradictions and perplexities, which everywhere meet us in Attic drama, are like our own and not to be too loftily dismissed. For since Christendom discarded the Devil we know not where to look for the origin of the world's imperfections, or whether to blame for them an incomprehensible Providence or ourselves.

It was not indeed in the nature of so good a soldier as Æschylus to turn his back upon the problem or confess defeat. So he has resource to the thought of time, measured not by years nor yet centuries, but by æons, the thought of its cyclic, and for us, immeasurable seasons, of other and earlier evolutions than ours, in which—an echo perhaps of Eastern philosophy—the gods themselves, the elder brethren of the human race, had their

birth and development. The words and wisdom of Zeus were not the final words or wisdom; for he but young in time, a god not of all periods and cycles, had also his allotted portion, subserved a diviner purpose than his own, and himself a learner, moving with the present world of men and gaining too in wisdom, travelled with them to a predestinate and unimaginable perfection. Somewhere, in this view, *beyond the last peaks and all seas of the world* lies the ultimate and reconciling truth; surely, and how natural the thought, of equal splendour with the undeniable and sensible heavens, that material and astounding emblem of a spiritual reality.

Speculations of this altitude may very naturally excite the derision of practical men, but for the serious reader of Æschylus there is no escape from them. And in some such fashion the *Prometheus*, a cliff difficult of ascent, may partly be interpreted. It supposes gods and men partners in an enterprise of which neither foresee the end, and the secret of Prometheus, if rendered into modern terms, might serve as allegory for the knowledge that man is as necessary to Zeus as he to man; since without him nature would want spectators, and be in fact nothing, as though it were not. To his consciousness nature is in debt, to him she appears, through his eye and mind alone perceives herself and thus comes into full and true existence. He receives from nature a body, he gives in exchange a soul. Without him

the kingdom of Zeus is, if so much, at most a material kingdom, an empty shell, an unilluminated void, an unperceived gyration, a senseless dust. Lifted out of apparent insignificance, man thus becomes and is, in simple fact, a necessary pillar of the universe. To give nature a meaning, a higher value, a soul, in the magnitude of such an undertaking lies, perhaps, his privilege and—his tragedy, of which the tragedies of the poets afford but broken reflections. For there is a material order, a system of laws unknown until explored ; an order not to be persuaded by burnt offerings or prayers. Through that natural order he steers by his own judgment and at his own risk, with freedom as his narrow and perilous attribute : narrow, for, of a surety, against the material system he cannot immediately or directly prevail ; perilous, for freedom unaccompanied by knowledge is an undesirable, an eyeless guide. In human freedom the plain man has always believed, and poetry, too, moving as she must move, among human passions and actions, perceives that passions have their conclusions and acts their consequences. But she knows also how unbroken a texture is life, a scene interminable, without beginning or end; in which, though it is true the clock of time points ever to the present hour, the invisible past presides and overshadows all. Events, we are aware, flow out of previous events, out of a great darkness, wherein by innumerable agents,

human and divine, the fabric of the world was made. Behind to-day stands yesterday. This is the Destiny with which Æschylus acquaints us, the hereditary curse or blessing, that with an unseen finger in the virtues, talents, or it may be vices, of his clan endows or smites the individual. Fate's poison or elixir was long ago distilled. It was long ago that the garment we wear was fashioned, the visible scene around us, the lands, cities, customs, languages we call our own, wrought in those ancient mills. An intense consciousness of this partnership of man with nature and of generation with generation, the inflexible solidarity of things, is the Cyclopean foundation upon which Æschylean drama rests. From the past neither gods nor men can shake themselves free. Draw aside the curtain of the present and you look out upon the eternal landscape, the dwelling of Necessity.

The case is not doubtful. Man is a fated sufferer, surrounded by indifferent powers; there is injustice in the very fabric of the world, written over it indeed in letters of fire; the stricken are not the guilty only nor yet the foolish, but often the noblest, the wisest, and the best—to this creed, honest, true and simple, we may cite Æschylus as a clear if unwilling witness, "a yea-saying without reserve to suffering's self, to guilt's self, to all that is questionable and strange in existence." There is neither nervousness nor sentimentality in his creed.

Sin and error are the dark inheritance of the human race and the misery that accompanies them ; yet they have their commendable uses, for, though transgression, whether God-ordained or of human choice, be a sad necessity and suffering its close companion, on the ladder of knowledge and of power these are the steps.

> "In the reproof of chance
> Lies the true proof of men."

There is no balsam for the world's incurable Philoctetian wound. None the less, and for that reason, it provides a superb amphitheatre for such men as are content to match themselves with gods and natural powers, and if need be die in action. Æschylus knows no way but one to aristocracy. As the sailor or the farmer become masters of their craft by the contest with wind and winter, so in his cosmology the soul would appear to be a vessel built for voyages not for havens, and a pitiful contradiction of its very nature to pray with the weary mystics for a sea without storms, a heaven of static bliss, a universe wrapped in eternal calm, that calls for no effort, nourishes no hope, provides no adventure, and gives birth to no heroic dreams. They may pray for it, but would it long content them to sit chin on hand for ever rapt in contemplation—Aristotle's notion of the highest felicity ? Man has something of the maker, the creator in him, and to make rather than contemplate what is made,

seems, if we study it, more consistent with his nature, and a more exalted ambition.

"Things won are done ; joy's soul lies in the doing—"

Nor need success be promised him, not at least to men of the Æschylean temper. The Greeks who fought at Marathon and Salamis did not ask for the certainty of victory, deeds contented them. We may, if we like, contrast to its honour this Greek pessimism, if pessimism it be, with the Oriental, and recall the words of Sarpedon in Homer. Because life is short he would have it more strenuous, because dark, brightened by achievements. This is the temper of the only races who have made gifts to men, to whom we stand in any debt. It is the temper of the English Beowulf and of Hercules the Greek hero *par excellence*, *πονηρότατος καὶ ἄριστος*, *the most hard-working and the best of men*, to whom difficulties brought happiness and danger inspiration. The rest—the Defeatists—are the beggarly receivers not the bestowers of bounty.

Though in the *Prometheus* he is very bold, Æschylus nowhere, like Euripides, makes an assault upon the justice of the gods, or openly exonerates the victims of their anger. We know that they are doomed, but *Zeus who is all things*, and without whom *nothing can befall any man*, has his divine purposes ; or a blind impulse, whose source is discreetly veiled, proves as with Eteocles in the *Seven against Thebes*, at once the road to ruin and

to the fulfilment of his father's curse. They but waste their time and ingenuity who labour to establish consistency in the ethics of Attic drama. So much and no more we can say that the guilty perish, and the righteous, if not always prosperous—such is the benevolence of the gods—are at liberty, if they survive, like Œdipus or Philoctetes, *a just man among the just*, to turn their sorrows to account. Hard put to it, Æschylus, unable to establish, asserts the rectitude of Heaven. Sophocles, too, despite all misgivings and the contrary utterances that involuntarily escape him, clings to the hope that the pious and the good have somewhere their divine helpers, and somehow their recompense. We must look to the end, as Antigone looks, and the end is not yet. Yet if we allow that punishment disproportionate to the offence is an injustice —and who will deny it ?—only a very determined piety will read the story of Œdipus, of Philoctetes, of Deianeira, the most pathetic perhaps of all tragic heroines since with childish wisdom she did all for the best,[1] with tranquil acceptance of the Olympian administration. It need not surprise us, therefore, that the drama of Sophocles, a gentler and more pensive spirit—though in some ways, as it were, his own age itself in marble—is suffused with a melancholy that Æschylus, with a soldier's acceptance of the hardships of life's warfare, never permitted himself.

[1] *Ἅπαν τὸ χρῆμ' ἥμαρτε, χρηστὰ μωμένη.*
"This is the sum: she erred, intending well."
Soph. *Trachiniæ*, 1136.

XIX. THE THEOLOGY OF PRIMITIVE MAN

Consider now the chief motives, the mainsprings of this ancient tragedy, the attempts made by the primitive theologian, Caliban upon Setebos, to unravel the web of human history, to trace his sorrows to their source, to account for the shipwreck of his own or another's life. What do the Greek myths, upon which their drama rests, reveal? First, in the background of the bleak and forbidding landscape of early religion the notion, most alien to our own thought, of the φθόνος θεῶν, the dark, disquieting notion of a spiteful or malignant deity, of whose displeasure public calamity, like the plague which afflicted Thebes, or the falls of princes, like Agamemnon, were manifest symptoms. The God of love was later born,and between primitive man and his gods no love was lost. The wise man made haste to hide himself, to escape their sight, to keep far from him, at a remote circumference, their ruinous attention. A few might be divinely favoured but wariness was best. With the Greeks of the sixth century, as their theological and moral sculpture became less archaic, refinement crept into the divine features; yet the Olympians themselves, emerging from the older and darker era, never

wholly lost their jealousy, their hatred even of the human race, of which the resolution utterly to destroy it, ascribed to Zeus in the Prometheus, is an obvious survival. Euripides, a philosopher of the Enlightenment, returning hate for hate, strikes savagely at the national creed when he assigns to Hera, in *the Madness of Hercules*, the ruin of the blameless hero, the peerless benefactor of Greece. *To such a deity who would offer prayers?* [1] Aphrodite's persecution of Hippolytus, too, jealous of his preference for Artemis, repeats the motive to decry the goddess. We are not to regard Euripides as a tilter at wind-mills: his scorn of the creed implied its existence, as Athena's exultation over Ajax in the drama of Sophocles also implies it; where the poet, whatever his own mental reservations, is content to make use of the conception as at least intelligible to his countrymen. And, after all, where is the flaw in this primitive reasoning which ascribes to the same source, to the Olympian powers, the gloom as well as the glory of the world's design? *Hard are the gods*, says Homer, *and jealous exceedingly*, and we may recall for our instruction that so shrewd a thinker as Herodotus found no difficulty in the idea of an envious Zeus. He had known envy among men.

As for the scorn itself, the intellectual superiority of Euripides, with its air of emancipated wisdom, claims from our generation universal praise. Happy

[1] Euripides—*Hercules Furens*, 1307.

Euripides, when from the hilltop of knowledge he saw his country's gods, that shining procession, pass phantom-like and forever under the shadow of Olympus, whence it had so gloriously emerged. Well, then, they are gone, and now he will tell us what to think, what to substitute for the outworn superstition? No very illuminating or communicable matter apparently. Like our own son of knowledge, Huxley, he achieves a somewhat dismal victory. "They never seem to reflect what a miserable position mine is—standing on a point of Nothing in an Abyss of Nothing."

They had their revenge upon him, the gods, upon this "gadfly of the mind," who affirmed nothing and, as Jebb says, "blurred the Hellenic ideals, which were the common man's best, without definitely replacing them." He is haunted. The moral and religious problems leave him no peace, they pursue him like the Furies.

For the multitude, then, the envious attention of the gods was the beginning of sorrow and, by a somewhat similar interpretation, the catastrophe —suppose it were the tragical exit of greatness from the scene of its triumphs—might be traced to the sheer prosperity of the victim and the divine dislike of a rival's power or glory, or, again, to his mere bravado, unbecoming a mortal, like that of Xerxes, casting chains upon the Hellespont. Success itself, which carried a man to great heights

of wealth, fame, victory, fortune, seemed in the Greek view to bring forth, as its natural fruit, disaster, to be dangerous, an offence to the masterful gods, who were careful to restrict rather than enlarge the sphere of human happiness. *μηδὲν ἄγαν.* "*Sail not beyond the Pillars of Hercules,*" is the advice of the cautious and pious Pindar. "But if any man shall possess wealth and excel others in comeliness, and in contests have won distinction by display of strength, let him remember that his garments are on mortal limbs, and that the earth shall be his clothing at the last." The lofty peaks attracted the thunderbolts of Zeus. Nothing so full of peril they conceived, as did Shakespeare, nothing so insecure as security.

> "You must not know His ways, and play Him off,
> Sure of the issue."

Not even the sun, says Plutarch, *will transgress his orbit, but the Erinyes, the ministers of justice overtake him.* As to run before a favouring gale may to the novice appear the easiest point of sailing, and is yet most hazardous, and to beat up against wave and wind often the safest of courses, so he who battles with life may well, they thought, be fortunate, and he who is swept along by following seas the nearest disaster. For the Greek, with his exquisite sense of propriety, trembled for the transgressor of bounds, the mortal apeing the divine, and

ὕβρις, insolence, arrogance, seemed to Æschylus and to Sophocles the unpardonable sin, never condoned by the Greek divinities.

> "Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire
> Is, not to seem too happy."

Observe now a step in the argument. *A great Nemesis came upon Crœsus*, naïvely suggests Herodotus, *because he thought himself the happiest of men.* A strange reason, you say. As it falls out, however, of singular interest, for, since the catastrophe is no longer traced to the victim's prosperity but to his calamitous self-esteem, we come into view of the mental bridge by which the earlier notion of mere divine malice or envy is carried over to become the just aversion of Heaven. A personal jealousy is transfigured into a jealousy for righteousness. Man, not God, is found blameworthy. Thus with the justice found within himself man crowns his deity. *Nemesis* in Greek history displays in its earlier and later sense the transition, somehow effected, between the doctrine of the spiteful and the retributive god. Nor is there need to ask what provokes his anger. *Misfortune from Heaven overtakes men who forget to think as mortals.* And who were those who thus forgot to think? Sinners or the pioneers of science? It is no clear issue; and closely studied appears to disclose in primitive thought less a sense of sin, of moral guilt than an

obscure and nameless fear of the unknown. Through both ancient and mediæval speculation there runs, like a dark thread, the notion of a *sanctum sanctorum* of nature, not to be hardily approached, and of a limiting barrier to human effort and aspiration—*Thus far and no further*—transgressed by Adam when he ate of the forbidden fruit, by Prometheus when he stole fire from Heaven, by Faust when, driven by the curiosity native to man, he grasped at magic arts. Over against bold enquiry, as against vaunt or ambition, stood Nemesis, the minister of the watchful gods, the guardian of the forbidden threshold; and beyond it, for the reckless adventurer, a region of horror and bewilderment, of supernatural modes of being.

Yet to this very adventuresomeness there is perhaps nothing we do not owe. Morality as well as science has had its martyrs and the race has best been served by those who forgot their mortal estate, pursued inquiries long deemed unholy, made trial of doubtful paths, set aside the mutterings of soothsayers, neglected planetary conjunctions and the smoking entrails of victims. It is the truth—and the primitive creed rests upon the truth—that nature commonly exacts a price for the knowledge she so reluctantly relinquishes:

> "There is the sport: discover how or die!"

And to those our ancestors adjudged impious the

modern world assigns its highest honours—a singular inversion of human judgment. For them the line between moral and intellectual *ὕβρις* was but waveringly drawn and the scientific explorer condemned by the side of the moral delinquent. And though this be natural and no cause for excessive wonder, it is surprising to see the primitive theologian, eager in their cause, at work upon his gods. They are not to be blamed for concealment of their law, even when so involved in darkness that the path to its discovery may be the path to ruin.

For if revealed only in and by his own destruction he will say—*Who but Zeus established the rule, learn by suffering!* Admirable humility; amid the imperfections of the world man, the only self-torturing animal, admits his own.

To that world-old interpretation of calamity as retribution, the visitation of God upon sin—the solution so confidently offered by his friends, to be as confidently rejected by Job, bewildered by the ruinous hurricane let loose upon him—a vast extension was given when it was discovered, by painful and growing experience, that men's deeds echoed down the generations, that the sour grapes eaten by the fathers set the children's teeth on edge. The Hebrew prophet, Ezekiel, repudiates a doctrine, so subversive of his theology, that the divine resentment which inflicts suffering upon the innocent may be traced to an ancestor's transgres-

sion, but the fatal inheritance of the family curse in the *Oresteia* argues its acceptance by Æschylus. Or again, when the social unit was rather the family or tribe than the individual, the misfortune, whatever it was, might be ascribed to the guilt of the larger and collectively responsible community. *For a city*, argues Plutarch on this theme, *is one continuous entity* ; or in the last resort it might be traced, as in Christian theology, to some remote breach of the divine commandment, to the original sin of man's first progenitor Adam, the father of all living. *Such was the pleasure of the gods*, says Œdipus, *angry, haply, with my race of old.*

Pass from the conception of envious and jealous gods to others which still further confuse the issue in Attic drama. In Lucian's Dialogue, *Zeus Cross-Examined*, the king of gods and man is put to much discomfort by his questioner Cyniscus. *Is all this about Destiny and the Fates told us by the poets to be trusted? Certainly*, replies Zeus. *Well, then, there is still another thing. There are three Fates—are there not?—besides Destiny, and there is Fortune too. People are always talking about their invincible power. How exactly is their power distributed? And do the Fates control the gods, and if they do, are you not as much their slaves as we mortals are? And, further, what about Providence? Is Providence a Fate or something greater, a mistress of the Fates? And who is to blame for it when good*

and honest men, like Phocion or Aristides die in destitution, and the ruffians and libertines, like Midias and Charops, who starved his own mother to death, live in wealth and comfort? Some of the worst scoundrels, temple robbers even, seem to slip through your hands. Are you responsible for it, or Destiny or Providence? And then again, if Fate brings about everything, which you asserted just now, when a man commits murder is Fate the murderess, and if so, should Minos not punish her instead of the poor men who, willy-nilly, obey her irresistible command?—Ah, I see how it is, concludes Zeus, *unscrupulous, quibbling fellow that you are. You have been with the Sophists, that accursed race! I decline to talk to you.*[1]

In the popular religion of Greece the gods were not, though immortal, the only governors of the world; they were themselves in some sense the subjects of an impersonal power, Moira, Fate, or Necessity; not clearly to be distinguished from Nature, the whole of things, or Eternity, the Space-Time of our recent speculators, itself a god and the greatest, *omnipotens et omniparens.* And, by a natural transition of thought, to early observers of the heavens, the unchanging and unchangeable ones marching in their everlasting orbits,—the stars who measure time and change and are not measured

[1] The Dialogue summarised. See for the whole, *The Works of Lucian,* translated by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler.

by them, to whom, unlike men who have no share in their morrow, neither the flight of years is known, nor dynastic revolution,—became its visible representatives. As the first of the generations beheld them so they are now, so they will be, and how should what befalls us, propitious or unpropitious hours and destinies, be determined save by their motions, by sidereal aspects and influences ?

Since the Greeks, however, were not given to astrology, until in Alexander's day Chaldean star-wisdom filtered into the Hellenistic world, this image of Destiny—its identification with stellar aspects—is absent from their drama, which includes no *star-crossed* lovers, like Romeo and Juliet, and Fate itself is by the poets more often interpreted as the will of Zeus than as an independent and superior power. Still it broods there, in their conception of the world, that thought of an implacable Necessity, an appointed order, to combat which the gods themselves are impotent; against which even foreknowledge, like that of Achilles that he would die young, or the warning of the Delphic oracle to Œdipus, provided no protection. *Evil was fated for him*, says Herodotus, and that is the end of the matter.

> "A greater power than we can contradict
> Hath thwarted our intents."

We have, indeed, our critics who argue persuasively that Destiny plays little or no part in the

drama of the ancients; but with this thesis in hand it needs a metaphysical touch to account for its wealth of divination, its numerous oracles and sooth-sayers, for the predictions of Delphi and Dodona. If events are not destined to take place how can they be authoritatively foretold? A delicate problem that.

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XX. FATE AND FREE WILL

Were we inclined to them there are few abstruse speculations to which the study of tragedy will not readily conduct us; as, for example, that interminable wrangle of the schools between Fatalism and Freedom, which the wisdom of the wisest has so far failed to lay asleep. If vice and virtue be products, *just as vitriol and sugar*, the world *a living geometry* and man *the cunningest of nature's clocks*, we are relieved, indeed, of further anxieties. The science of morals falls within anthropology, and history becomes a curious play of marionettes, dancing on the wires of an invisible necessity: or, in Plato's milder phrase, we are the playthings of the gods, and therein, some say, not unfortunate. It is the best thing for us that it should be so, that we should remain in the hands of the Great Sculptor, whose chisel, life, is fashioning mankind to the divine pattern. Yet, if that indeed were true, one cannot but reflect that we have here an unaccountably slow, painful and circuitous route for a divine artist to have chosen, and sadly littered with his broken pottery. It is easy to believe moral excellence no more within our grasp than mental, and easy to think of a happy disposition as not less a fair fortune, a kindly lot, a

gift of the Good Fairies, than beauty of limbs or feature: a thought not too difficult to bear by those who prefer no absolute freedom, but as much only—and that how little!—as is compatible with their present knowledge and power to make good use of it. Yet a complete surrender to the opinion that man neither possesses any, nor is on the way to freedom, must so undervalue as irretrievably to ruin human dignity, make of life a very negligible and sorry trifle, and if widely and firmly held—a feat happily made impossible by nature—act as an acid solvent of both interest and effort.

XXI. FORTUNE

If the doubtful honour of the world's government be in Greek drama shared by Destiny and the gods, theirs is succeeded, amid the convulsions which followed on Alexander's conquests, by an undivided sovereignty, the sole and undisputed sway of a goddess—Fortune, whose wheel in that disordered age revolved with such frightful swiftness as to mock the thought of any order in Heaven or stability in the affairs of men. Though a dim figure in the Greek Pantheon—a newcomer, a minor deity, τύχη—Fortune climbed with the Roman Imperium to starry eminence and, gathering to herself the glory and the power of *all Olympus' faded hierarchy*, alone of pagan deities preserved her dominion throughout the Christian era. Homer makes no mention of Fortune, Virgil makes her omnipotent. With the Christian philosophers Providence attended to the larger rhythms, the vaster universal scheme, but sub-lunary and human things, the rise and fall, the ebb and flow of their fluctuating and incalculable tides were conceived as in her charge. So Dante believed and, as a poet should, found her angelic occupation. For Donne, similarly, Destiny *is the commissary of God, Fate, whom*

God made but doth not control. In popular religion she seems to have filled the whole horizon. So strange and universal a worship as Fortune's, a goddess unloved and unlovable, dim of feature and without moral attributes, baffles the mind, and in itself affords pathetic testimony to the mystery of our human state; so fantastic, changeful and insecure as to seem in the opinion of many, and those not thoughtless minds, the deliberate design of an impish and capricious power. For how, they say—an argument not easily disposed of—can we judge of the artist but by his creations, of God and His purposes save by the work of His hands, the world He has fashioned for our habitation? And, above all, how are the simple, the ignorant, the unphilosophic—shall we say the majority of His creatures?—to understand or explain their situation to themselves? Given little assistance they, like the learned, must do their best to provide their own solutions—the superstitions that take the place of answers. And for this are they to be blamed? *Often has the thought entered my mind,* confesses Euripides himself, *does Fortune or some divine power sway the life of man?* And, if the least noble of imagination's creatures and unworthy a seat in Heaven, it may at least be further cited in defence of Fortune's cheap divinity that Shakespeare, inheriting her from the middle centuries and finding no better symbol for the uncertain

governor of the world, seems, at least if frequency of invocation be the test, everywhere either to leave the matter in ominous silence or to make her the responsible arbitress, *rerum humanarum domina*, the mistress of all things human.

XXII. TYPES OF TRAGEDY

From this survey it may properly be concluded that students of tragedy, however reluctant to set up as theologians, have to confess themselves equally *the victims of infinity*, and immersed of necessity in the higher politics of the universe. Poetry looks out upon the whole scene of our existence, and though its arithmetic be beyond both, in tragedy goes hand in hand with religion on the highway of her abstruser speculations. And, if we review the motives which govern the masterpieces, we arrive with their authors, as is natural, in a considerable perplexity; observing how some are disposed, when responsibility is laid upon an external agency, to attribute the tragic catastrophe to a malignant or envious deity, some to Destiny or blind Fate, some to the caprice of Fortune, some, as when Deianeira sends the poisoned robe to Hercules, to chance or unlucky accident ; our own superior age to a power more prosaic certainly, but as cloudy and ill-defined, the rule of circumstance. *Zeus is dead, but his son, Whirligig, rules in his place.* A brilliant emendation ! Others again, with less talent or taste for the incomprehensible, fly that enchanted ground, avert their eyes from man's

place in nature, exclude the gods and insulate the human scene, betake themselves to social problems, to psychology and the inner conflict, the moral and spiritual tragedies of the divided self, depict for us the hero's ambitions, emotions, impulses, expound his perplexities and errors, and make him wherever possible the contriver of his own harms; a type of tragedy preferred perhaps for two reasons; first that amid its social and secular surroundings we feel ourselves more at home than with the ultimate and baffling problems of existence; and again that we lack the poetic symbols which enabled the Greeks to stage those problems with such dramatic power and propriety.

Tragedy of this secular type, it is often and plausibly claimed, secures for character a wider scope and higher dignity. In character, no doubt, the dramatist finds a fulcrum for his lever, and so provides himself and his audience with an intelligible clue, a thread through the labyrinth of human history. All action involves the interplay of character and circumstances, and of these though its inner springs are wholly hidden from us, character at least we think we understand; and since we understand little else in the world, give to it, and with justice, absorbed and limitless attention. Yet to identify the interest of tragedy with the interest of character is to let the truth escape us.

Phaedo, in the Platonic Dialogue which bears

his name, speaks of a *certain wonderful passion and an unusual mixture of pleasure and grief*, experienced by him and all the company present at the death of Socrates. An interesting analogy, for this emotion and this strange blending of happiness and pain are, it is agreed, precisely the effects of tragedy. Set aside for a moment the happiness, what in tragedy gives rise to the pain ? That a man of such and such a character is clearly by reason of it involved in ruin ? How pleasantly intelligible, and how charming of Nature to make things easy for us, to adapt herself to the most limited comprehension. But we know better, and it appears nearer the truth to say that Nature is not concerned so to adapt herself. To the tragedians her gait reveals the goddess. Is it not when they perceive that character, like everything else, is of her giving and at the same time appears nothing to her, and that any, the best and most beautiful characters, whose gifts and graces we most envy, whatever their strength and with whatever wisdom Nature gave they pick their steps at the ford, may by the rising tide of circumstance be swept away—is it not then they ask for our tragic horror and astonishment ? Are men thus betrayed, goodness no security, the preferences of Heaven not theirs ? The history of the tragic hero is the history of a man, like Œdipus or Othello, at home in and apparent master of his world, of rare talents, eminence, prosperity—on

him, through some miscalculation or sinister mischance, another and unseen world begins to encroach. Power fails him, reason fails him, gifts fail him: his vessel, dragged from secure moorings, is dashed ashore. And the place of character here? Character is itself a strange and terrible thing, and assuredly has a place in tragedy, but to be admitted as a factor only, no further than as a part of the interminable web, the side of the pattern visible to us, or that portion to which our human perspective assigns a nearer and thus clearer station. The differences among men, enormous, vital, dwindle to a cipher when set over against their resemblances and their common destiny. One observes, too, that as scientific interest in character heightens, tragic interest almost necessarily declines. Naked tragedy overlooks shades of character. Its essence is that such moving things happened to a man, a human being like ourselves. Its power lies in the events, and as the primitive stories and ballads of all races give evidence, it is enough, however undifferentiated the characters, if the situation stirs in us the extremes of pity and alarm.

Notice, for example, how this insistent demand for a link between the hero's deeds and destiny may lead us astray, how it tortures so simple and intelligible a play as *Hamlet*, making of it an enigma where there is in fact none. Here is Hegel's version of the customary formula—"the ruling powers give to each the lot he deserves for his own acts." Thus although Hamlet is entangled by the accident of birth, from no personal choice, and wholly against his will in the knot of foulest circumstance, the critics, from Goethe, Schlegel and Coleridge to their most recent and faithful followers, blindly or deliberately overlook the situation and decide that Hamlet is the victim of his own irresolution. And why? Because otherwise no fault, and fault their law appears to require, can be found in him. Yet it is a mere foolishness to suppose any. With what reason can a natural and proper aversion be construed into shortcoming? *A great deed*, they tell us, *is laid upon a soul unequal to the performance of it. A great deed?* The hangman's! *Unequal?* Yes, if by unequal we mean *too noble. He is thought-sick, and has lost the power of acting by his habit of pondering and speculating . . . the everlasting*

broodings and superfluous activities of his mind have disturbed its balance. Remarkable words. Was Shakespeare thought-sick, or Bacon, master-ponderers and speculators both? What great men, or little, have had the balance of their minds disturbed by superfluous activities? Or perhaps we are to suppose that in so detestable, so unsavoury a society, in such a situation as fell to Hamlet's lot, the well-poised, healthy mind should feel pleasantly at ease and at home. It seems a little unreasonable to expect it, and hard also to require the true man to undertake upon his uncle the executioner's duty, and make of his repugnance to the hideous act a fault of character. You will say "Hamlet accepts responsibility." Yes, it adds to the hardship of his lot that he does so. Nothing could be more human. But how many men have thus needlessly tortured themselves! Lovers of simplicity will, none the less, prefer to side with Hamlet and, if blame there be, to place it to Fate's, not his, account.

XXIV. THE HUMAN TANGLE

To return. Here we exchange the outer conflict of man with circumstances for the direct collision with others or the inner collision with himself, *a divided self*, since he is at once a person seeking his own proper ends and the member of a community in whose texture the ends of others are incorporated. This is that wide region of the problems of conduct and the tragedies which spring from the everlasting clash of divergent aims and interests, the human tangle. Here ambitions conflict with ambitions desires with duties, private with civic interests, the ideals of yesterday with the ideals of to-day. "The farmer," as says Montaigne, "thrives by the dearness of corn, the architect by the ruin of buildings, the officers of justice by quarrels and lawsuits; nay even the honour and functions of divines is owing to our mortality and vices. . . . And what is yet worse, let every one but examine his own heart and he will find that his private wishes spring and grow up at the expense of some other person." Notice that in the tragedies that arise out of the commerce of men with men the heroes are not always those who know that they are right, like Antigone, or that they are wrong,

like Macbeth, but men naturally perplexed and hesitant, in doubt, and legitimate doubt, which way to take, on which side to stand. It is less difficult by far to do what is right than to know what is right to do. Yet we hate to face the truth, to think that the best will in the world goes for nothing when we have to decide whether to obey the rule or the intuition, the law of the clan or the family, to resist evil or bear with it, to slay or spare the enemy, to pardon or punish the guilty, to undertake responsibility or relinquish it, to believe or disbelieve the tale we are told, to speak or hold our peace, to embrace or reject a doubtful cause. We hate to think that there is no handy foot-rule for the making of such decisions. Yet often the hero is seen at odds with himself because there is none; and, though wisdom may assist a man to his own choice of action, the event is the sum of innumerable acts, a million, to which he has contributed only his penny or twopence.

Heraclitus was of opinion, we are told, that *strife was the parent of all things*. Yet observe in the world the greatest of its many miracles—amid manifold disorders the principle of harmony at work. Whence comes it? With the universe as text there is no end to discourse, but—to permit ourselves a digression—that in some manner and measure it is a confederation, a society seems clean beyond argument. Into the abyss of beginnings no one

may venture. Let us, adopting a popular hypothesis, take our stand, however, with science where there is a semblance of foothold, a seeming support for the mind. Look out over the reign of primal chaos and assume those pigmy immortals, the atoms, its first and only inhabitants. How, we know not, but somehow, let it be imagined after æons of strife, certain it is that they have so far composed their individual differences, if they had any, as to group themselves into orbs, cycles and epi-cycles, into seas, lands, elements and atmospheres; and propelled, further, by some obscure pressure of necessity or affinity, sufficiently adjusted their private concerns as to achieve in union those brilliant victories of co-operation, the flora and fauna of field and flood. These again, the fact is patent, have their several fraternities, and thus to the observer's eye the whole fabric presents, rank above rank, its intricate and innumerable partnerships—its secret sympathies written in the earlier atomic alliances, and later in the confederations of families, clans, nations, group within group, community within community—those agreements or friendships, which from molecule to plant, from amœba to man, ephemeral or age-long, by ways and for reasons beyond our imagining, built within the gossamer net of time and space, the clusters of the patterned world. A union of unions, a society of societies indeed! The One of the philosophers is a grand surmise, but to per-

ceive the Many we need but look around us. And a Many which however disturbed by discords, vexed by conflicting purposes, has none the less attained, in its federations, at the least a partial congruity, an equilibrium, an order, a composition of diversities. The instinct in nature for alliances appears invincible. The flock, the swarm, the covey—a hundred such words also testify to her preference for the republican form, for organic assemblages. Man, a traveller on the same social path, seeking the pole-star of an undivided will, has scarcely yet attained so perfectly articulated a federation as some more humble earth-dwellers, the insect and the bird. "What wise hand teacheth *them* to do what reason cannot teach *us*?" And the cause? The more varied your requirements, the more intricate and difficult are the adjustments necessary to secure your ends; and the human being is a formidable bundle of them. With the growth of individual consciousness the plot again thickened. Primitive society frowns and must frown, upon eminent personality when it appears —the sense of self, the aloofness, the private desires and ambitions, the disregard of the old blind instinct for co-operation. Then religion and morality are called to the community's assistance, invoked to impose their restraint upon the recalcitrant wanderer, to buttress the social fabric endangered by his separatism:

"Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock
Open great eyes at you and even butt,
And thereupon you like your mates so well
You cannot please yourself offending them——"

So with consciousness emerges a new power, conscience, the word in some languages the same, the deliberating sense, which sets up a religious or social standard above the simple impulse to personal happiness, to private aggrandizement at the expense of others. Though all desire good and only good, yet from the struggle for its various forms or appearances arise evils and tragedies. Over against the individual stands Nature, over against him also stands the community: tragedy is the measure of their differences and conflicting purposes.

In this our human state "it is hard," as Hume says, "I dare to repeat it, it is hard," that when our wants and necessities are so many, "when almost every thing and element is either our foe or refuses its assistance," we should also have our own deficiencies to struggle with, our bodily weaknesses, our inertia, our wayward temper, passions, and desires.

Yes, it is hard. And who will not marvel at the rôle allotted to the great Sultan, the adversary of mankind, the villain of the piece, who, upon consideration, is yet seen as a necessity of the design, indeed the keystone of the arch? His has been a heavy part, and by universal acknowledgment he

has played it well. The hisses and execrations of the pit are his applause. You may imagine another order of architecture for the world, but would it be a better? In this he occupies the centre of the stage and gives the play its fire, life, movement, interest, significance. Pain is the spur to activity, the means, as says Kant, by which divine Providence urges us to exertion. *Vexatio dat intellectum.* Think in human terms and without this counterpoise there could be neither action nor plot, neither tension nor conflict, neither alarms nor excursions, neither reverses nor successes. The virtue of the heroine, the courage of the hero emerge from his opposition. But for him we had wanted the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, the noble army of Martyrs. It is a considerable something. No battle, no victory; no disease, no physician; no Satan, no Saints. Perhaps we owe him at least a "Good morning."

Such, at all events, is the world, and such it seems for long likely to remain, so long, indeed, as to preclude any urgency of preparation for another. There is no end to it in sight, nor would it endure a static perfection. If our planet were designed for a paradise, a place of perpetual happiness, the design has manifestly broken down. But what reason have we to suppose any such design? When all is said it would be difficult to imagine any less

suitable, less adapted to our human constitution, any in which we should feel less at home than such a planet. *Requiem aeternam dona eis Domini!* A common prayer with Buddhists and with Christians, but the prayer of exhaustion, of despair and defeat. Put away pretence. Out of conflict the race has emerged, for conflict its sinews are hardened, in conflict it displays its highest powers. Wish it away and you wish yourself no longer a man.

> "My business is not to remake myself,
> But make the absolute best of what God made."

The *pacifist*, so-called, has never half understood the world and is incapable of understanding it. He is committed to a task harder than that of improving; to the task, in short, of reconstructing nature. He desires things to be what they are not, to eliminate the differences which make the world possible, to fly with one wing, to like without disliking, to approve without disapproving, to overcome without resisting, to banish evil by turning his back upon it, to civilize the scorpion and Christianize the tiger; that is to unmake and remake them on the pattern of the fawn and the rabbit. He asks merely that the streams should run up-hill and the rose tree bear pumpkins. He would have his planet with a southern but no northern pole. Everything, however, is what it is, and in the moral world leans for its existence on

its contrary, as courage upon the possibility of cowardice, magnanimity on that of meanness. *They that endeavour to abolish vice*, as Sir Thomas Browne tells us, *destroy also virtue*; *for contraries, though they destroy one another, are yet the life of one another*. What makes us haters of evil makes us at the same time lovers of good; and if evil vanished from the world much good, the most precious, would assuredly go with it, and the best in us rust unused. The world is far from perfect, but it may none the less be a world worth living in, is certainly the only world we are fitted either to understand or inhabit, and perhaps the best possible for beings like ourselves.

"Sicily, Greece will invite, and the Orient;—or are we to turn to
England, which may after all be for its children the best?"

XXV. ARISTOTLE ON TRAGEDY

Turn now to Aristotle and matters of another complexion. If not in the foreground of all discourse upon tragedy, then in the background, a dominant figure, stands this authority of authorities, for so long a kind of intellectual Jupiter, not lightly even in our modern and irreverent age to be set aside. And no reader of the Poetics, a treatise, however age-worn, of surpassing subtlety and suggestiveness, will wish to set it aside. True, it deals with a single form of tragedy only, the Greek, yet a form, needless to say, still by far the most interesting and instructive for us; a form, moreover, of immense and incalculable influence upon succeeding forms, and of such native and unborrowed splendour that praise is superfluous, whose praise is, briefly, that after millenniums of years, a star of the first magnitude, it continues to shine with unwasted light. One turns confidently, therefore, to Aristotle, not indeed believing him with Lessing, *as infallible as the elements of Euclid*, nor for the last word, which none can supply, but for a word of genius. What then has he to say? Much to the purpose, but to be read with wary discrimination. For on the threshold we are

cautioned that this master's works are esoteric, published and not published, charged with interior meanings, and only perfectly to be understood by pupils who had received his oral and private instruction. Acquaintance, moreover, with the teaching of Plato is assumed in them, and conclusions already reached in the *Metaphysics* and *Ethics* are latent throughout the *Poetics*. Add that it is obviously a fragment, and one perceives that there is room here for conjecture and diversity of opinion. Replace ourselves at Aristotle's feet, at the exact centre of Greek thought, or of his thought in 340 B.C. or thereabouts, we cannot. His doctrine, nevertheless, is not wholly irrecoverable, and upon two points at least, the function or aim of tragedy and the character of the tragic hero, the brilliant and ingenious analysis lays instant hold upon the attention.

XXVI. CATHARSIS

Take, first, the culminating sentence of the celebrated treatise, the apex, as it were, of the argument. *By means of pitiable and alarming scenes tragedy brings about a catharsis of the emotions which have been aroused by them.* A sentence, if sentence it should be called, and not a tourney ground or field of learning, on which scholars have tilted for centuries and may perhaps tilt for centuries more. Of what may we be sure? First that Corneille was in error when he argued, trusting to a later passage, that in Aristotle's view it sufficed if tragedy aroused one or other of these emotions, *either* pity *or* fear. That Lessing, too, tripped, though ingeniously, upon a misconception. For the sufferers in the drama we felt pity, he fancied, fear, on the other hand, for ourselves lest we, too, might incur similar misfortunes. But where does Aristotle hint at such a distribution? In the *Rhetoric* he tells us, indeed, that *all things which we fear for ourselves we pity when they happen to others*, and again, *Generally a man pities when he is in a position to remember that like things have befallen himself or his friends, or to expect that they may.* Let it be so. Still the plain man knows

that fear may be felt without a vestige of pity; pity, as when a childless man commiserates another who has lost his only child, without a vestige of fear. No, the fear and the pity, there is no reasonable doubt in the matter, are free from all personal reference, are felt—so Aristotle meant it—both for the same object, the suffering persons in the drama. There our eyes are fixed, our interests centred, our hearts engaged. Terror for ourselves, if in any measure real, could only distract our attention and dissipate our sympathy. At the great crisis in Othello, for example, when he enters with *a sword of Spain the ice-brook's temper*, how could miserable forebodings of a mere imaginary phantom of coming pain for ourselves arise to insult the tragic woes actually before our eyes—Desdemona's horror and piteous end, the anguish of Othello's great afflicted soul? The truth lies elsewhere. *True pity consists not so much in fearing suffering*, writes Bergson with finer instinct, *as in desiring it. The desire is a faint one, and we should hardly wish to see it realized; yet we form it in spite of ourselves, as if Nature were committing some great injustice and it were necessary to get rid of all complicity with her.* How admirable a stroke of insight!

And *catharsis*, what are its meanings and implications? If we could question the philosopher he would doubtless refer us to his famous doctrine of the *mean*, the point of balance, of equilibrium, the

perfect poise. To interpret the phrase as a transmutation or conversion of the tragic emotions into *virtuous habits of mind*, a purification of the feelings in some ethical sense—Lessing's proposal—is impossible. That such was not Aristotle's meaning scholars are agreed. He had in mind not the idea of moral improvement but of æsthetic pleasure, of an agreeable relief. One knows not, to be frank, whether he speaks as a physician or a moralist, as a critic of poetry or a man of science. Their various rôles were not so distinct in the fourth century before Christ as in ours, and Aristotle was a polymath. But of this we may remind ourselves—catharsis is not of one type only, the tragic. Men are subject to pity and fear certainly, but there are other emotions for which an outlet may also legitimately be sought, the emotion, for example, which leads to laughter, the aim of comedy, or that more complex which meets the historian of all ages and countries, religious exaltation. Refer to his *Politics* and *Problems*, and you find mention of ailments, physical and mental, and their homeopathic cures. There is, so to phrase it, a terrestrial body and a spiritual body. There is a catharsis of bodily humours and substances, sources of disorder, a catharsis also of soul substances, swellings, imposthumes, as our older writers name them, of the affections. *A principal fruit of friendship*, Bacon observes acutely, *is the ease and discharge*

of the swellings of the heart. Some gatherings medicine will relieve, others the surgeon's needle, others again, those of the soul, music may carry off, as David's harping dissolved Saul's melancholy, or comedy reduce to order, or tragedy harmlessly and pleasantly discharge. Thus when the equilibrium either of body or soul is disturbed by accumulations which occasion discomfort, it may be restored, the harmony which is health re-established. Music and pity and laughter, all have their medicinal use, a therapeutic value. And tragedy, so apparently Aristotle conceived it, is a pleasant medicine, a cure for certain affections of the mind, disturbers of its peace. The tragic emotions, none can deny, are natural to us. They have their just occasions and proper objects. *So spake he*, as Homer says, *and in all of them awoke the longing for lament.* Not at all times nor perhaps with all persons, but at some times and with many persons, the natural *humours* accumulate to the soul's discomfort or disease, and what is by some severely felt is in a measure the experience of all. These affections are not in reason's name to be at once and peremptorily suppressed. There is another leechcraft, a better remedy and a milder, making use of music or of tragedy to restore the patient to himself, to the equilibrium of health and sanity. Other delights the poet adds to the prescription according to his skill, sweetenings, pleasurable accessories, and in

these even the least emotional natures, with whom feeling seldom gathers to a head, may take pleasure ; but chiefly the tale of pity releases, as a fit of weeping eases the burdened heart, the pent-up, agitating flood, and peace succeeds the inward storm.

A theory, we may unreservedly admit, as pretty as it is popular, and of interest to us since something of modern psychology, which dwells upon the dangers of repressed desires, is here anticipated. Repression, it appears, leads to neurosis. The ideas associated with emotional states may, some physicians tell us, if denied their natural outlet issue in instability and hysteria. Relief of the unconscious mind, whether of the community or the individual, from psychical tensions is at times a necessity, and the prescription recommended is such as will create symptoms resembling those of the malady to be treated. The milder ailment cures the severer, the external excitement draws off the internal, the fear without disperses the fear within, the cup of the soul brims over and tranquillity is restored.

And if you care to add refinement you may think of this release as an escape from personal pre-occupations and anxieties into the larger life of sympathy with the whole human clan, the universal world, which embraces that great society of *the living, the dead*, and *those yet to be born*.

XXVII. PLATO AND THE POETS

Aristotle more than glances at, he opposes the doctrine of Plato the declared enemy, in his famous assault upon poetry, of feeling, never reconciled to that flighty, reckless driver of the human chariot. The emotions he pictures in another image as the chains of the prisoners in their cave. The poet, Plato argues, inviting them forth, deals with *an inferior part of the soul.* "Listen," says Socrates in the Republic, "to one of these tragic heroes beating his breast and bemoaning his griefs." Enraptured at the skill of the poet the best of us will give way to the delight of sympathy. This *natural hunger after sorrow and weeping*, when we are unfortified by reason and self-control, takes us unaware. We think it a gain when we feel the accompanying delight, and account it justified, not reflecting that the *feeling of pity which has gathered strength at the sight of the misfortunes of others will not be repressed in our own misfortunes.* There rises the ugly head of doubt in Plato's mind. If we pity others shall we not the more give way to pity for ourselves? Perhaps, therefore, to excite compassion is *the meanest of all objects*, whether in tragedy or real life. Poetry, maintains Socrates, "feeds and waters the passions

instead of drying them up: she lets them rule instead of ruling them, as they ought to be ruled, with a view to the happiness and virtue of mankind. 'I cannot deny it,'" replies Glaucon, and the conclusion is that, when the honey-gathering Muses are at work, pleasure and pain will rule in the state and not reason.

No such trenchant stroke as Plato's against the poets had before or has since been dealt. Was it a feint or a serious assault? How firm a heart had this man, a poet himself if ever there were a poet since the birth of time, putting aside with gentle but inflexible hand this honey for the lips, the consolations and comforts to which we pathetically cling; and, unmoved by all that charms and softens the asperities of existence, accepting as final and unchallengeable the austere imperative of reason, for most of us so unsympathetic, so chill and bleak a schoolmaster. Inhuman, we might call him, but for our knowledge of the compassionate heart beating there concealed, as with Odysseus, *while his eyes kept steadfast, as it were horn or iron.*

Are we then *to look to nothing else, not even for a moment, save to the reason,* as Marcus Aurelius, a Stoic of the Stoics, also maintains? These are indeed counsels of perfection, it may be said, and as a man of this world Aristotle has the best of the argument. But consider more narrowly. Is the divine Plato's psychology at all to be trusted?

Condemn the tragic emotions outright and what is it you do? You are on the way to discredit the affections and sympathies in general, all feelings with these feelings, and what else is this but to censure the architecture of nature and shatter the very fabric of the soul? Ask for a life of pure thought and you ask for a pallid, colourless, unimaginable world, blank, motiveless, inane. If it be the world of the angels, they may well be pitied. For the emotions are not merely forces with which we have to reckon. They are the mainsprings of action, *the wheels of the chariot by which we are carried through the world.* Without them is neither height nor depth, neither life nor death, nor any other creature, sympathy and antipathy being, in fact, the northern and the southern poles, on which our human, magnetic planet swings. Liking and disliking rule the world, and determine, as Hume thought, even such great things as our philosophies. Consider further. To shelter from fear is to shelter from the affections. "*Love is full of fears.* Fear is the offspring of love, its lieutenant in all great and critical enterprises, injecting into the higher emotions and sentiments an intensity and momentum with which they cannot afford to dispense. Fear is *one of the hiding places of man's power*, the strongest of all mental stimulants; it so shocks and vivifies the soul that the experiences however ordinary which follow upon its impact stand out

with a strangeness and power not otherwise obtainable." [1]

Or look again at pity and for your instruction open the books of the moralists. Their lights flicker a little. The tragic poets, some say, appeal to the malevolence native to us, a malicious pleasure in our neighbour's distresses. Others, to our surprise, like Plato and the Stoics, accuse them on the contrary of a miserable and mischievous sentimentality. They deal in pity, a vice not a virtue, a defect and disorder of the soul, from which the wise man shakes himself free. Why men hold their opinions is of greater interest than the opinions themselves. There is a reason for this doctrine and a narrower inquiry reveals it. Philosophers, jealous for the moral order of the world, have no choice: they must look askance at compassion. It is awakened by undeserved misfortune, and if such indeed there be, it accuses Heaven of injustice, the conclusion at all costs to be avoided. "That God is the author of their misery, the poet is not to be permitted to say: though he may say that the wicked are miserable because they require to be punished, and are benefited by receiving punishment from God; but that God, being God, is the author of evil to anyone is to be strenuously denied, and not allowed to be sung or said in any well-ordered commonwealth by old or young. Such a fiction is

[1] Professor Kemp Smith.

suicidal, ruinous, impious." [1] Well, then, are we to believe man his own and only enemy? If we may dare to speak for the poets that is not their conclusion, and they will answer "Pity is in our nature and, however it be explained, undeserved suffering in the world. For the first, we do not take upon us to rebuild the soul on another pattern than its Maker's: for the second, we prefer facts for our foundations, and to face rather than fly the truth."

There is still more to be said. Press steadily to the heart of the matter and we are in straits till these austere disciples of reason have vouchsafed us the infallible tokens by which they distinguish thought and feeling, have taught us how to hold them and know them apart; coming to us, as they do, hand in hand from the misty hollow where they dwell, *in gremio mysteriorum.*

Despite his words registering the harsh decree Plato, one thinks, is hardly to be interpreted inflexibly, and would at least have allowed with Seneca that pity is *a fault of noble souls.* We may regard him as a philosopher who, when in perplexity, leans towards the side of reflection as the best of helpers, preferring the steadier intellectual light—a heliotropic mind such as we must wish for ourselves, following the sun of reason. For the final judgment

[1] Or more briefly—*Αἰτία ἑλομένῳ, ὁ θεὸς ἀναίτιος.* "The fault is the chooser's, God is without fault." *Republic*, x. 617c.

consult a gentler moralist, Plutarch, and see him place his finger unerringly on the truth when he writes that there is in the soul something composite and twofold, reasoning and unreasoning parts, and commends the zeal of Pythagoras for music, that charmer and soother of the passions; knowing that the soul was "not altogether amenable to precept and instruction, and redeemable from vice only by reason, but that it needed some other persuasion, a moulding and softening influence to co-operate with reason." Oh wise, simple, and humane Plutarch !

XXVIII. CAN WE ACCEPT ARISTOTLE?

Is Aristotle's account of tragedy, then, final and sufficient? It has its modern and admiring exponents, who hold that the passage of two thousand years of human history asks for the doctrine little modification, that its author, a miracle of brain, once and for all proclaimed the truth. We must in justice set aside our private thought. Do these tragic emotions, this *catharsis*, represent your experience, the contents and processes of your mind before, let us say, a representation of Hamlet? Probably not. Your interest is intellectual not emotional, of the mind rather than the soul. The exciting incidents, the ghost's appearance and revelations, the plan of revenge, the king's dismay, Ophelia's fate, the venomed rapier, the duel and the poisoned bowl—you are beyond the reach of capture by things like these. You, a sophisticated and reflective playgoer, recall former representations, compare the voice, gait, gestures of this Hamlet with those of some previous actor in the part, you ponder Goethe's interpretation of the play or the relation of the first to the second Quarto text, you ask yourself how much of the author's philosophy filters through the hero's soliloquies. These and

a hundred other curiosities of inquiry, it may be, engage your mind. Yet how irrelevant and beyond the mark is all this. With the passage of time foreign interests have usurped those proper to the drama itself. You inhabit a different world from that of the Elizabethan groundlings, nor were thoughts like yours once entertained on the benches of the Globe Theatre. Nothing survives in you of what tragedy meant for the spectators in Shakespeare's day, or for those who witnessed the *Agamemnon* or the *Medea*. It may be hazarded that Aristotle shared this detachment, was concerned with tragedy as a philosopher more than as a man, and described less what he himself felt than what he knew others to feel, that the pre-occupation with the events upon the stage, the tension, the bursting heart when

> "The ploughshare of deeper passion
> Tears down to the primitive rock,"

were the subject of his lectures rather than the substance of his experience. Nevertheless, he understood the violences of feeling to which the Greeks were so prone, understood, too, the *vis medica poeticæ*, assigns a higher importance to the emotional than the psychological interest of poetry, and to plot in consequence, justifiably, the first, and to representation of character the second place in tragedy. So far he secures all votes.

The measure Aristotle applies appears to be the measure of sheer emotional poignancy. He is right to apply it, but he stops short of the summit, at the point of supreme interest. Tragedy, we believe, transcends the sensation drama, the mere rending of the flesh. Tell us how; all hangs upon that. Rising out of the same ground it yet differs, as the poem for princes differs from the *volks-lied*. On this cardinal matter he is silent. Aristotle viewed tragedy, as he viewed most things, with scientific aloofness; took note of it as a superior and striking form of art, well worth analysis, very moving in good hands and a valuable safety-valve for excitable folk. He finds, as one might say, *nothing beyond the telling*, and so overlooks its peculiar nature and significance, its striving after more than it expresses, its religious and philosophic attachments. Tragedy is for Aristotle an agreeable medicament. But who is prepared to believe that its cathartic virtues have captured for it the attention of so many philosophers and that in them resides the secret of its power? Pity and fear—how do, or how can these emotions provide the lofty satisfaction of tragedy? There is a gap in the argument. He would have this medicine restore us to the normal, to health, but surely it is an elixir not a remedy, and the function of tragic drama is to exalt not to cure us. The spiritual reverberations and overtones, the deliveries of tragedy, like the responses of the

Pythian priestess, are cryptic and hardly to be caught flying. Were truth so tame a bird, as easily to be encaged in definitions, Aristotle's would be the last word in many inquiries. But the dried plant loses its planthood, and vital essences escape the logical categories. His love of setting things in a clear light, than which admittedly nothing could be more agreeable to our intelligences, contracts for him the truth, as the sun's brilliance contracts the cosmic field, extinguishing the depths of space, the colonies of stars. He sets and there they are once again, unextinguished and inextinguishable. Intellect incarnate, Aristotle plumbs all depths, probes all secrets, illuminates all mysteries. Yet when he has done with them they return to haunt us. We cannot too greatly admire and revere Aristotle, but on this side idolatry. He fails because there is not enough of the poet or mystic in him, yet with easy confidence he puts the poets right and affects a knowledge of their art beyond that of the tragedians. They are required in the interests of his philosophy to accept the world as open to logical interpretation, to exclude the irrational elements, the operations of fate and accident, to inflict no sufferings on the innocent, to present one type of hero only, a man who is ruined by a single weakness. Happily, the Attic dramatists came too early to profit by his instruction, Shakespeare too late. This master of analysis

approaches drama from the angle of science, emphasizes structure and plot, sets forth the formal requisites and at the critical moment—lets fall the problem. For when he has done his best to exclude the irrational he permits it to slip back again under the guise of the *wonderful, τὸ θαυμαστόν, which depends upon the irrational, τὸ ἄλογον.* Like Hegel he passes with disdain, with head in air, the facts of life which have the insolence to stand in his way, and so eviscerates tragedy, whose very existence reveals a discord in nature's music and demonstrates the thesis he is most at pains to avoid. Its baleful star perplexes these philosophers, since there looks out from it the face of spiritual apprehension and alarm, such a face

"So dull, so dead in look, so woebegone,
Drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night,
And would have told him half his Troy was burned."

XXIX. THE TRAGIC HERO

For simplicity and brevity nothing could well surpass Aristotle's doctrine, so justly celebrated, of the tragic hero. It assumes, though we ourselves may be far from good, that our instinctive feelings must side with goodness, and the villain, therefore, cannot take the stage. For to represent him either as successful or unsuccessful is hopeless. His passage from bad to better fortune, since no man believes himself a villain, could evoke neither sympathy nor moral satisfaction ; while for his collapse from high to low estate, from prosperity to ruin, compassion would be sought in vain, its place taken by contentment with the justice done. If the villain be excluded, however, so also is the saint. For make the good man suffer, represent his career as ending in disaster, and the spectacle is too terrible—*μιαρόν*, morally offensive, an abomination. Yet, on the other hand, if we are to sympathize with him, good in some sense the hero of tragedy must be ; nor is it less necessary that he should at the same time suffer misfortune. That is the dilemma, the required situation without which there can be no tragedy. How is it to be met ? It can only be met according to Aristotle, if the disaster

which overtakes the good man is in a measure self-inflicted, the consequence of some fault or frailty, *ἁμαρτία*, of his own which leads to ruin. The rebound of his own act must bring him down. An eagle, writes Æsop, "that was watching upon a rock for a hare, had the ill-hap to be struck by an arrow. This arrow, it seems, was feathered from her own wing, which consideration went nearer her heart she said than death itself." The thrush, too, he tells us, "was not half so much troubled at the thought of dying as at the fatality of contributing to her own ruin."

Tragedy, then, it would appear, must not expose the moral order of the world to criticism, if there be such an order, which Aristotle's ruling clearly assumes. It assumes that if misery and ruin overwhelm innocence we have a chaotic universe, a world at odds with itself; an idea, he would have us think, blasphemous and irrational. Since the spectacle of totally unmerited suffering, if indeed there be such a thing, is too terrible, shocks our moral sense and must therefore be eschewed in tragedy, what remains? One type of subject, and one only, the familiar type of Nemesis following guilt or error, in which the hero at least contributes to his own misfortune.

We shall not be far wide of the truth if we say that for the clear-eyed intellectualism of the Greeks error was sin and sin error, miscalculation, in short,

a form of guilt, for which Nature had no forgiveness. They saw that God appears to punish foolishness or ignorance more severely than moral depravity, and that prudence in vice was an excellent safeguard against its evil consequences. And though Socrates identifies virtue with knowledge, vice with ignorance, it still remains obscure in his doctrine, as in that of the Christian age, which distinguishes—passes more lightly over intellectual than over moral faults, condemns sin but condones the lack of intelligence—why we should regard ourselves, if we do, as responsible in a higher degree for our moral than for our intellectual frailties, or for our intellectual than our moral.

XXX. Ἁμαρτία

A wonderful doctrine this of ἁμαρτία, built upon a word open to a multitude of interpretations, a boon, therefore, to commentators ; a word charmingly vague, which solves no single question we desire to ask and raises a hundred, which so confuses the issues in respect of tragedy as to leave us in a maze. Whether it means a moral or intellectual error, of the heart or head, no one has yet discovered, an error arising out of a momentary or permanent state of mind or character, an error to which responsibility attaches or does not attach itself, an error which could or could not have been avoided, whose results could or could not have been foreseen, an error of ignorance or passion or miscalculation. The doctrine represents, of course, no considered opinion of its great contriver—to suppose it were to suppose him a simpleton ; some lecture note it may have been, a sally, a dexterity of his wit, a point of departure in discussion, an exercise or thesis for the consideration of his pupils. Either it is introduced deliberately to limit the scope of tragedy, to make it less than a mirror of life, or it appears to assume, what we cannot suppose Aristotle to have assumed, that

to the numberless and varied problems of conduct suitable and corresponding solutions exist, lie, as it were, upon some accessible shelf within human reach. For brevity's sake let us ask—what should Orestes, or Hippolytus, or Hamlet have done? No one can tell us, for no one can indicate what was for each the path of duty, the precaution omitted, or the error which precipitated the catastrophe. In all but the rarest cases such matters are disputable and endlessly disputable. The best of judgments in human affairs may be unfortunate, and even prove the worst—these and not the obvious lunacies are the tragic errors. Probability, as Bishop Butler tells us, is the guide to life, but no one leans upon probability as upon an oracle, or thinks the calculation of probabilities the equivalent of divine prevision. There are many simple folk in the world, but who so simple as to suppose that all the problems of conduct are open to definite solution?

None the less the particular stroke of Fate, you will say, is often strangely appropriate and proves her a skilful archer. The hero, like Nelson on his vessel's deck, may court his end. Or again, invulnerable at all other points, he may be assailable through a single weakness, of which with apparent intention, Destiny makes, as of the pride of Ajax, the jealousy of Othello, a dexterous use.[1] For such

[1] See Schopenhauer's essay *On the Appearance of Intention in the Fate of Individuals.*

a hero with the heel of Achilles, the poet, Aristotle advises, should diligently seek, for a plot which exhibits the rationality of things. He would make use of the poets, he would harness them to the chariot of his philosophy. And certainly if the function of tragedy be to exhibit a moral order intelligible and consistent, such a hero and such a situation are well-calculated to display it. But who determined that this should be its function? Who ascribed to the poets this interesting task? And who has proved the existence of this order? We pause, as the rhetoricians say, for a reply. No one denies that it is within a man's power to create a monster, a kind of Frankenstein, which destroys its maker: that Achilles may fall where some lesser man of half his strength, but without his weakness, might have stood firm: that Hamlet would have been deaf to Macbeth's temptations and Othello contemptuous of the weaknesses of Anthony. Aristotle is so far right that he saw in subjects like these opportunities for the tragic poet. But by virtue of what authority does he limit their range? He knows, but he does not tell us, that there are other roads to tragedy than the follies and frailties of men, that blameless persons are found among the sufferers. He prefers, apparently, that the truth should not be made too public. Yet of all truths this is the most tragical, or if not, what is it? How wide, then, is the province

of tragedy and how narrow the region he surveys.

So whether he had in mind intellectual error or moral failure, a knot difficult of solution, for with all his wit he fails to make his position clear, this conception of the tragic hero, if we value integrity of judgment, remains unsatisfying. It would have us accept a specious justice, some intelligible nexus between action and its train of consequences, when often there is none. "Everything we do has a result," said Goethe wisely, "but that which is right and prudent does not always lead to good, nor the contrary to what is bad." Such is in effect our problem. Only when results can be calculated or foreseen can we speak of failure, and an "ethical system which denied that the best and wisest men were sometimes compelled to act utterly in the dark would be in glaring contradiction to the facts of life." [1] In this incalculable world to act and to blunder are not two but one. The wisest and the best are but as children, and there is no truth in the doctrine either in life or tragedy, the mirror of its grievous mischances, that the afflictions of the good are necessarily the fruits of their own acts, of imperfect character or faulty judgment, that errors never creep into the reckonings of Fate or that her awards are impeccable. "We cannot find by experience," said Bishop Butler, "that all our

[1] *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, by J. McT. Ellis McTaggart.

sufferings are owing to our own follies." On the contrary, experience tells us that pious men and true have been hated for their piety and truth, persecuted for their services to humanity, imprisoned, tortured, assassinated, for their sagacity and nobility. Let us put aside these tiresome superficialities then, well buried as low as Atlantis, that either nature or society deals with individuals according to their deserts; that Lear was justly served for his impatience, Hamlet for his irresolution, Romeo for his impulsiveness, as follies parallel to that which would make Galileo the author of his own misfortunes—*guilty of having seen the earth revolve around the sun.* If we are not bewildered by life we should be, and tragedy awakes in us this just bewilderment, arouses our pity not for merited but unmerited suffering, and gives us painful pause when we reflect that the ways of Heaven are not for our understanding.

> "Just or unjust, alike seem miserable,
> For oft alike both come to evil end."

Aristotle, despite the customary praise lavished upon his doctrine, the devout prostration of the critics before him for twenty centuries, runs counter to the poets and misleads us. They reveal in tragedy the moral perplexities of life, he disregards them. They bow themselves before the mystery, he expounds it. The interest of the poets, as becomes

them, is wholly in the individual, his, as a philosopher, in the moral order. Tragedy exalts its hero, he to save the rationality of things would put him in the wrong. Yet before now vessels which kept a compass course through the darkness true to their port have been struck by a dismasting squall, or foundered upon unseen wreckage in the night. Read for the true sense of the matter and their deeper wisdom the last words, how touching, of Antigone. "What law of Heaven," she asks, "have I transgressed? Why, helpless one, should I look to the gods any more, what ally should I invoke?" Not in this world but another must she find the unravelling of this perplexity, cherishing the human hope that her coming will be welcome there, pleasant to father and mother dead and gone, and to her dear brother, for whose happiness in the place beyond she had sacrificed herself.

Think of life or tragedy as a divine law court, in which the dooms are proportioned to the mistakes of head or heart, and we wholly deceive ourselves. Conceive it rather under a different figure—the tide setting against the wind, the seas leaping high when the current of character makes against the gale of circumstance. Not until resisted does the current show its strength, not until it meets the unfriendly facts is character revealed. How he will act in an untried situation, in the crisis of unforeseen strains and pressures, no man knows. There lies the interest. How will he act? Act as he may, how-

ever, let us put aside the temptation to advance the issue of the conflict in so vast a theatre of unknown forces as a judgment on the action, and admit it as a commentary only on the strange complexion of the world.[1] Nor, though it be frequently forgotten, is responsibility for the calamity the one and only question of tragic drama, which is not a little concerned with the manner in which calamity has been and may be met.

The door to tragedy turns very easily upon its hinges. Clear as the Aristotelian exposition may seem, and however it may be interpreted, the true problem is there veiled, as it is veiled for example in *Œdipus* or *Lear*, to mitigate out of consideration for our human weakness, the terror and the truth. But no more than veiled, for only in some outlandish legal or official sense does Œdipus, unconscious of guilt, deserve his fate, nor does Sophocles desire us to believe it, any more than Shakespeare desires us to believe that Lear's headstrong folly was appropriately punished. Lessing, and not for that tenderness to be blamed, finds the thought intolerable that good men may incur undeserved misery. "Religion and common sense should

[1] "The real morality of actions—their merit or demerit, and even that of our own conduct, is completely unknown to us. Our estimates can relate only to their empirical character. How much is the result of the action of free will, how much is to be ascribed to nature and to blameless error, or to a happy constitution of temperament (*merito fortunæ*), no one can discover, nor, for this reason, determine with perfect justice." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*.

have convinced us," he insists, "that to think so is as erroneous as it is blasphemous." But it is not erroneous, and the moral offensiveness we meet with in the world is, in fact, the tragic problem. The tragedians face it that they may know the enemy, as fencers watch the opposing steel. As for us we revolt against it, and the intensity of that revolt is the measure of our souls. Remove it, and with the tragic problem all problems vanish, small and great. It remains, however, that

> "Wall of eagle-baffling mountain,
> Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured."

Nature has obviously other purposes and other eyes than ours; an unfortunate matter, we think, who would have our Eden without the serpent; but we must take her as she is. "She takes no account of intention or purpose. She destroys with a magnificent indifference, alike the man who has injured his body by self-indulgence, and the man who has injured his body in his work for others. Her bacteria are shed abroad equally on the man who lets the drains go wrong, on the man who is trying to put them right, and on the child who was not consulted in the matter. Some people assert Nature to be above morality, but, whether above or below, she is certainly indifferent to it." [1] Those who set out to praise truth should be prepared to accept its bitter savours.

[1] *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, by J. McT. Ellis McTaggart.

XXXI. DR. JOHNSON ON *KING LEAR*

"Shakespeare," wrote Johnson, "has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural idea of justice, to the hope of the reader, and what is still more strange, to the faith of chronicles. . . . I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death that I know not whether I ever endured again to read the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor." How honest he is! How much more courageous in facing the truth than the moralists! How averse to the evasions of the philosophers! Troubled like that Diagoras of Melos, who gave up God when he considered how the wicked prosper and the righteous perish. *Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause.* But tragedy gives us pleasure and the perusal of *Lear* left Johnson unhappy. Either then, Shakespeare failed to supply the compensation, the balance of good, for whose sake we gladly endure the spectacle of undeserved suffering, or the failure was Johnson's, whose spiritual eye was momentarily darkened. A question of considerable interest and moment. There are many men who, like Johnson, from excess of human sympathy, the poet's insufficiency or their

own, cannot endure such a picture. There are others who, like Aristotle and Lessing, would have tragedy support the moral order of the world by suppressing the facts. You may do so for your own comfort, if it comfort you to do so, but you must not ask Sophocles or Shakespeare to suppress them. They take another way, the way untroubled by argument, by which we know that the Sistine Madonna's face is lovely and the Campo Santo at Pisa divine. We take heart at the sight of such beauty and of human creatures who, as Keats said, continually give birth to new heroisms. Beauty needs no arguments, for it is itself the strongest argument in the world ; and the work of art is a burning-glass which so concentrates the rays of beauty as to set the soul aflame.

XXXII. POETRY AND RELIGION

"Religion," so runs one of Goethe's pregnant sayings, "stands in the same relation to art as any other of the interests of life. It is merely to be looked upon as material with similar claims to any other material." Precisely, and with this material the poet deals in tragedy, which revolves around the central problem of our lives; the paths of all the sufferers, Prometheus, Œdipus, Othello, Hamlet, lead to this Rome. But when religion, for one cause or another, ceases in our day, as with Aristotle, to be the commanding human interest, when its queries are set aside for scientific, literary, and political queries, the greater poetry, deprived of its proper substance, languishes. Religion itself, when it recedes from poetry, making terms with the insulated intellect, subsides and cannot but subside into an ethical system, Confucianism or another; poetry, too, as it withdraws from religion takes up, perforce, lesser and varied material by the way: morals, history, romance, social manners, and becomes the poetry of Pope or Scott or Morris, a lowland type of literature, and may decline in level to mere *vers de société* or lapse wholly into the plains of prose. It counts at least for something that the

great periods of art, of drama, of architecture, of painting were ages of faith, periods when men looked about them with amazement and trembled before the splendour and mystery of the world, "an unspeakable God-like thing, towards which the best attitude for us, after never so much science, is awe, devout prostration and humility of soul;" as Carlyle wrote, "worship, if not in words then in silence." Yes, adds our own age, if you can assure us of any response.

"'Tis mad idolatry
To make the service greater than the God."

XXXIII. THE PARADOX OF TRAGEDY

What then in tragedy escaped Aristotle ? That from its poverty we extract sustenance, from its wretchedness satisfaction, from its discouragement, confidence. He overlooks the violent paradox of tragedy, that it presents the worst and excites in us the best, that it appears to sum up and complete the accusation against life, to be occupied with the case for the opposition, that there poetry meets the hostile facts, the injustices, the cruelties, the dark forbidding elements, the aspects of the world which profoundly discourage us and—*mirabile dictu*—to our comfort and delight ; that it kindles fires it should extinguish, should dismay, and, on the contrary, inspires us, should dispirit and yet increases our resolution ; that its conclusions are not contained within its premises, that it radiates light from darkness, destroys hope and harbours it ; that do what disaster may with these heroes they gain the more upon us, overthrown they are not overcome, and defeated with every circumstance of ruin they still triumph ; that when Nature has vanquished and cast them out they continue to reign in our affections, in a kingdom inaccessible to Fortune, uncircumscribed by time and with a relish of remoter duration.

We are told by men present at that stupendous

conflict, the Battle of Jutland, that exalted by it above themselves, caught up, as it were, into a region so elevated as to render ordinary life insignificant and hardly worthy of attention, they were unable for many succeeding days to accommodate to its trivialities their transformed and reborn vision. A higher scale of values was somehow theirs, a new and vaster perspective, a kind of cosmic as distinct from earthly consciousness, or glimpse of what existence at some level, intenser far than ours, might well be; carrying with it, in its train, unimagined interpretations, divinations almost, of the true nature and scale of things. Such a field of thought, veiled from our plodding minds is disclosed by tragedy; a view, or outlook, or way of regarding ourselves and our surroundings, to which Sir Thomas Browne in his "Christian Morals" directs us. "Let thy thoughts be of things which have not entered into the Hearts of Beasts; think of things long past and long to come; acquaint thyself with the choragium of the Stars and consider the vast expansion beyond them. Let intellectual Tubes give thee a glance of things which visive Organs reach not. Have a glimpse of incomprehensibles and Thoughts of things which Thoughts but tenderly touch." We may call it poetry's attempt to ascend into this region; an emotional outlet, but a metaphysical also, for the surcharged, perplexed and travelling mind.

XXXIV. SCIENCE AND POETRY

To digress once more. Look back into the past. You find that magic, the ritual out of which tragedy arose, is religion in its earliest garb, merely another acknowledgment than ours, primitive man's acknowledgment, of a transcendental world. Historically examined, religion and poetry have their roots in magic ; the priest and poet in those untutored times, the evidence is sufficient, were magicians, men, it was believed, in the secrets of Nature, with some knowledge of the mystery. Our science has set herself the task, and all hopes are with her, to surmount, reduce, dissolve that mystery; and to no nation as natural philosophers, rationalists, bringers of light into dark places, is our debt so deep as to the Greeks, to no single thinker, perhaps, deeper than to Aristotle. Yet it persists, despite all the efforts of the intellect, impenetrable to reason, and the age-long labours of science resemble the scratchings of a knife upon a wall of rock a million miles thick. The world remains *full of divinities whose apparitions on all sides strike and dazzle our eyes*, and poetry unrebuked, therefore, may still, as of old, utter its incantations and oracles, its lovers unabashed give ear to them. More than that,

ὁ φιλόμυθος φιλόσοφος πώς ἐστίν, the *lover of myths is in a manner a lover of wisdom also*, and willing, indeed, to allow that if thought will not serve us nothing will. But is it our all in all? Thought, unaided and alone, will not solve the contradictions that beset the mind. Reason—shall we call it creative thought?—works upon evidence and is the more reasonable when it is willing to hear all witnesses. So we must travel. Yet travel by what road we will, the boundaries of the soul, like the horizon, will always be beyond us.

Lessing, it will be remembered, declines to allow that the French have true tragedy. And if from this cask the best wine has not been poured for us, may it not be because theirs is too pure an intellectual vintage, lacking in the indescribable essence, the bouquet of poetry? The French authors of principal account, of whom Voltaire is brilliantly representative, have chosen the way of the intelligence, the solitary path of the forensic intellect. For he who in search of a religion of the mind approaches the obstinate problems of existence, praying like the Greeks before an engagement for favourable omens, consults perforce, at the cross-roads, at the crisis of his journey, the poets or the atomists. There is the way of science, which conceives the cosmic riddle to be no more and no other than a conundrum for the wits, and the way of poetry, convinced that it is none so

one-sided or unqualified a matter, which essays to supplement their intellectual exertions. Ponder that saying of the sagacious Goethe, "a literary production, and *all the better* for being incommensurate with reason." Science, philosophy, are they unacceptable? By no means. No one was ever more willing to accept them. They proceed, however, upon the hasty assumption that we think best in cold blood, in *a cool hour*, whereas it seems at least a plausible conjecture that in some fields of knowledge the heated mood, the agitating hour, reveals a vital truth, inaccessible to the frigid and fruitless logic of the schools. "That which we call heat, *θερμὸν*, appears to me something immortal, which understands all things." Indisputably there is a delectable fellowship in reason, which unites us with nature, knits us into the fabric of existence, and makes us a single flock, feeding on a common pasture. Yet those who praise it most appear least to appreciate its modesty, its steady and critical eye upon itself. Poetry is assuredly not above logic, yet may fire and carry it to unexpected heights; as seamanship is not above science, though, with the added warmth of courage, it may surprise us into admiration, as when *Calliope* fought her way against the hurricane out of Samoa harbour, or *Ortega*, in the late war, baffled her powerful adversary by plunging into the fierce and uncharted waters of Nelson's Straits. To comprehend the soul,

moreover, as Plato took note, we have to understand the whole of nature, an undertaking of some magnitude. Reverse the judgment. To interpret nature successfully, let us say—such is in effect poetry's contention—it is useless to employ less than our own totality, the whole of ourselves. Add, then, to logic imagination, to reasonings sympathies, to intellect instincts. These also are in nature's image, her gifts, and in some measure, therefore, in her secrets. You suspect them? Well, poetry, too, suspects in unaided reason an insufficiency, suspects in the failure of that *wonderful and unintelligible instinct*, as Hume styled it, to provide a solution of any fundamental problem, some natural weakness; suspects, in short, a missing factor or value—that its calculations are thrown out by an overlooked inclination, as it were, of the world's axis. Before the soul, before poetry, music, beauty, before the passion for life itself, logic recoils; and well it may, for it knows nothing and tells us nothing. Man has hardly yet discovered man, and there are surprises in store for us.

Putting aside, then, the matter of the physical sciences as insufficient, passing also with a shudder the pallid, abstract, conceptual field of the logicians, a valley of dry bones compared with the bright-eyed particulars of the world around us, upon what does poetry rely? Opening a window upon another landscape—or like music finding itself when

the other knowledges are on the brink of failure, so that one hardly knows by what charm it supports itself like a planet in the apparent void —proceeding by way of the natural affections, the things embedded in us by the creative process, that one knows in one's heart and soul, poetry, a sensitive art, practises a craft foreign to the logical understanding, giving ear to tones and chords, *airy Nuncios*, *sympathetical insinuations*, vibrations of the inner voice, whispers from the ground of our being; since there is for it a scale of values, measurements of another order, a musical science or mode of knowledge not less becoming in human creatures, and assuredly not less necessary for the comprehension of the world than the natural sciences. They are nature in us and, unless we are to postulate some monstrous flaw or fallacy in the constitution of things, to be reckoned with and charily challenged. The aspirations, ideals, or divine sagacities implanted in man—love, joy, hope, admiration—there is a secret intelligence, speaking from far by way of these strange and yet unassailable realities, and to learn the truth you must listen in the orchestra of nature for the tone of each instrument.

XXXV. CHARACTER IN DRAMA

Aristotle's classification of character as good or bad *simpliciter*, sufficient though it be for drama, where the portraits must of necessity be drawn with few strokes, with immediate firmness and certainty, forbids the subtler psychological analysis for which the modern mind exhibits so eager an appetite. With good and bad characters, taking the words in an easy and elastic sense, we are in drama content. The hero, or good man, a person to whom our feelings are friendly, to whom we wish well, with whose disposition, aims and purposes we are at one ; the bad man, a character lacking in some vital human or social quality, with whom we refuse to identify ourselves—to go beyond this distinction, though further interests may well enough be added, is to exceed the simpler and essential dramatic requirements. We must know on which side we stand, more we need not know. Only when thus contracted, moreover, distilled into action, or reduced to terms of behaviour at some selected moment or crisis, can character take the stage. Since thoughts and feelings, too, are private, not public, matters—morally and socially subordinate, therefore, to acts—drama provides room for the exhibition of

character in action, none for its scientific scrutiny or the exploration of its intricate recesses—a study for the study, not the theatre; and there sufficiently a mystery, a hive of secrets of which no account has yet been or can be rendered. Whether our own or another's, we can do little more than observe character in present conduct, or guess, for the most part vainly, at its future manifestations; since we are riddles even to ourselves, and the candle of introspection sheds but a feeble ray, fitful and flickering, into the labyrinth of the mind. His true self no one knows, and beholds only the pictures which that self throws upon the screen of consciousness. How unimaginative to suppose that into this unexplored country the dramatist can take us far. For astonishment—if you are capable of it, and some are not—no long travel is necessary: look into yourself. Children may think of character as a thing plainly to be seen, single and simple, like a plant or flower, but in this plant or flower for the child what involution of structure, form, colour, habit, what a bundle of botanical problems are discoverable.[1] For consider the world within us and its innumerable constituents—intelligence, will, memories, impulses, fancies, attachments, passions—a system of elements in everlasting motion, each and all present in varying degrees of intensity at each succeeding moment, yet none

[1] See *The Foundations of Character*, by A. Shand.

measurable by any scale of weight or value ; clusters dissolving and again combining to form new alliances, their patterns altered by every change of external circumstance or current of attention, by every breath of instincts—offensive, defensive, playful, filial, parental ; so that fear, joy, grief, hope, pride, pity, patience, disgust, loyalty, fortitude, admiration and all the rest, each affected by the group to which it then belongs, influenced by the interest that for the moment rules, weave within the soul their eternal dance of an intricacy inconceivable, taking to themselves now one partner and now another, executing new steps and figures in ever-altering communities. Thus we see sorrow at one time in the company of anger, at another associated with envy or with apathy ; courage in this group linked with hope, in that with despair ; wonder joined now with alarm, now with delight ; love with fear, with tenderness or with ferocity ; pity hand in hand with sweetness or, again, with anguish —a bewildering spectacle, as of the motes in a sunbeam or a cloud of summer insects, tracing in their interminable, interlacing curves a plot beyond the possibility of the draughtsman, paths beyond any mathematical determination. For who will draw for us a stellar chart of our nature, in which inherited instincts organized in our bodily structure, actions reflex and reflective, habits, interests, purposes, desires, sentiments, affected in their

several degrees by thoughts of self, sex, family, friends, religion, country, all the diverse emotional and intellectual promptings, are assigned each its exact place and influence in the milky way, the constellation of the soul ?

XXXVI. HUME ON TRAGEDY

Among English writers, and they are not many, who have occupied their thoughts with the subject, that admirable economist in words, Hume, less *bedazzled with the infinite* and with less *thirst for totality* than the transcendentalists, is best worthy of attention. Only those critics with some tincture of philosophy, he remarks, have examined the problem of our pleasure in tragic drama, and to this *singular phenomenon* he addressed himself in an essay of delightful lucidity, but, alas! disappointing brevity. It was not enough, says Hume, to tell us, as does the Abbé Dubois, that any spectacle, however painful and disagreeable, is better than the insipidity of languor, any cure for our listlessness a boon. Very possibly it is so. But the ingenious Abbé failed to discriminate, to account for our displeasure at the sight of the terrible events themselves and our pleasure at their rehearsal. If the representation of distress serves to enliven the jaded mind, the real distress should enliven it still more—a disagreeable and false conclusion. Nor again is Fontenelle's explanation, which ascribes our contentment simply to the knowledge that the poet's tale is but a fiction, wholly complete and

convincing. We know it, indeed, and know, too, that the heart is curiously attuned to the music of melancholy. Yet we require more from the tragedian than the sense of sadness, the bare recital of suffering. What, then, do we require? *Eloquence* is Hume's answer. As Cicero, when he had for his theme the butchery of the Sicilian captains by Verres, drew tears from the judges by the splendour of his oratory, so by the poet's rhetoric our natural uneasiness is dispelled—it were truer to say turned to account in such a fashion that a period is put to our sorrows and the minor exchanged for the major key.

Such is the power of order, rhythm, beauty upon the mind already deeply moved, stirred by the spectacle of misery, that, borne upward on that wave of emotion, we become the more susceptible to another and powerful stimulus, the music and the splendour of eloquence. Thus our distress melts into delight. Terror, sadness, anxiety agitate the soul far more powerfully than joy or security, and so agitated it becomes the more responsive to the poet's art. "Nothing endears a friend so much as sorrow for his death," and nothing so assists the poet as a troubled and uneasy heart, that, already trembling, trembles the more to the melodies of his speech. Thus in tragedy, if the gloom be not too deep, the scene too horrible, the audience may forget its griefs and taste a strange happiness distilled by the poet from pain. Very true, we must say, and

regret that so convincing a discourse ends here. Certainly, all will agree, tragedy in prose, though not impossible, is maimed, shorn of its noblest support, since poetry, like music, creates an atmosphere, which invests the characters in drama with an aureole, an added dignity, as on the Greek stage the robes of the tragic actor gave to him an impressive majesty. Nor is it easy in the phrase of daily speech to support the rhythm or deal with so moving and so great a thing as life. In prose we are in a manner earth-bound, the slaves of convention, of common-place and of custom. From these falsehoods in our better or best moments we desire an escape; and since, though life is always interesting, the hints of something hidden and greater in it make it more interesting still, by music and poetry which raise the veil, which endow us with a kind of heavenly understanding, we are drawn nearer to the truth, and see, or seem to see, meanings, implications, manifestoes of things present and things to come, not to be blazoned or clapper-clawed in the language of the markets and bazaars.

To reach the centre, however, another question remains to be answered—upon what does this eloquence rest of which Hume speaks, to what is its efficacy really due? Clearly its appeal is to something in ourselves, some chord is struck, but for whose presence in human nature eloquence were no better than silence, or than music on deaf ears.

"Let those who wish to continue the war against the stranger," said Garibaldi, "come with me. I offer neither pay nor quarters nor provisions. I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death." Explain to me the force of this appeal, why it warms and not chills the heart, and I will listen when you speak of tragedy. There is a natural fire in man which declines to accept defeat. In this fire, fanned by the poet till it flames, is the secret of our delight in tragic drama. Nature can break man's body, his will she cannot break, perhaps because it is her own, in all his weakness an index of her strength; and with that knowledge there goes a deep and proud content, an almost fierce satisfaction.

"I began," wrote Keats, "by seeing how man was formed by circumstances—and what are circumstances but touchstones of his heart? And what are touchstones but provings of his heart, but fortifiers or alterers of his nature? And what is his altered nature but his Soul?—and what was his Soul before it came into the world and had these provings and alterations and perfectionings? An intelligence without Identity—and how is this Identity to be made? Through the medium of the Heart? And how is the heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances?" Let us add, and what is tragedy but a mirror of the process by which the intelligence acquires identity and becomes a soul?

XXXVII. THE HEGELIAN THEORY

The philosophic traveller must, at some point in his journey, cross the range of high German hills amid which towers the cloudy peak of Hegel's thought. In the majestic survey of things human and divine that summit affords, tragedy is included, but unhappily no account of the æsthetic doctrine apart from the philosophical system, of which it forms a dependent and outlying province, can hope to satisfy Hegel's followers. For, though the simplest of us may in faith receive, no mere student of the drama is at liberty to expound, much less reject, the Hegelian theory of tragedy, which, and nothing could be more logical, stands or falls with the system as a whole. Thus the almost impenetrable profundity of the latter becomes the august protection of the former. Yet a valuation is possible. Without examination of its structure certain conclusions may be based upon the consequences of a doctrine and, as a wayfaring man though no botanist judges a tree by its fruits, the value of a theory be in a measure appraised by the character of its results.

Let us say, then, that for Hegel the world was of reason all compact, a translucent globe of rationality,

ruled by immortal powers, the spiritual principles to which humanity owes and renders an unceasing allegiance. If we care to employ the ancient symbols we may call them the Olympian gods in their blessedness. A tranquil repose is theirs in Heaven, a perfect harmony. Among men they have many names—loyalty, duty, honour, obligation, affection, family ties, patriotism, justice, and to their beneficent guidance all ordered communities must commit themselves or fall into ruin. The fundamental concordance of these ethical powers, their unity and rationality, are not in art, he tells us, to be questioned. They are to be acknowledged, vindicated and upheld; in tragedy as any man may see, the hardest of tasks since there, reflected from the world's imperfect mirror, the light of Heaven appears but broken, the white radiance of eternity stained by the kaleidoscope of time, its revolving actions and events. They are not to be questioned though, parcelled out among individual wills and purposes, the spiritual principle battles with itself; though upon earth and among men a conflict or series of conflicts rages when one good, one right, one ideal, is set over and asserted against others in themselves equally justified: a collision, it may be, between loyalty to the state and loyalty to the family, between love and duty, between laws human and laws believed divine. Each demands obedience, deserves obedience, is

justifiable, yet when espoused by the individuals, who identify themselves each with one, in defiance of other rights, other goods, the peace of Olympus is disturbed; we have division among the spiritual powers. And this is tragedy. For the spiritual principle cannot deny itself or brook division, and if reconciliation fails, vindicates its unity by the destruction of the contending and partial claims. Tragedy reveals how in this our world the absolute right may become two wrongs. And since for us all claims enter into and become persons, since each good, each right is represented by man or woman, they too stand condemned and share in the catastrophe which awaits the assertion of one ideal against another no less worthy of devotion, the catastrophe by which the supreme power manifests its unity and strength—

> "Th' ethereal substance clos'd,
> Not long divisible."

Thus the eternal reason,

> "Not liable to fear or flight or pain,"

wins its cheap and very pitiful triumphs at the expense of the sentient creatures, of Deianeira or Desdemona, of Hippolytus or Hamlet.

And the central problem, our pleasure in tragedy which depicts this ruin, which shows us the blind and broken Œdipus taking leave of his children or Cordelia dead in the arms of Lear, to what is that due and how is it secured? Above *mere fear and*

tragic sympathy, they are Hegel's words, *we have the feeling of reconciliation*, which tragedy provides *in virtue of its vision of eternal justice*, paramount over *all merely contracted aims and passions*. We are caught up into a region above that of time's shadowy and passing conflicts, above personal pains and sorrows, in which, for those who have eyes to see, reason shows the world as "one entire and perfect chrysolite." This is the compensation, the healing balm, not for our trifling sorrows as spectators only, but for the wounds of the tragic sufferers also. There are some men, one inclines to think, who will be long in Hegel's or any Heaven before they forget the miseries they have witnessed upon the earth. Yet if you decline to accept such a reconciliation at the price of such pain, if your human pity overpowers your appreciation of the eternal harmony, if you lower your eyes to Antigone's martyrdom instead of lifting them to the beatific vision, you expose yourself to Hegel's contempt. Philosophy is not for sentimentalists with their ready tears. *This ordinary sensibility*, the words again are Hegel's, that is to say, a *sympathy with the misfortunes and sufferings of another—your country cousin is ready enough with compassion of this order. The man of nobility and greatness has no wish to be smothered with this sort of pity.* With what sort then? Pity that is *in accord with the ethical claim associated with the sufferer.* And if

you have supposed that this *ordinary sensibility* of yours was wholly in accord with the ethical claim that Œdipus, that Hamlet, that Cordelia, *as persons* make upon your sympathy, if you have supposed them punished out of all proportion to their faults, whatever they were, and your compassion *on that account* their due, confess yourself now in error. They have no such claim. Tragedy displays eternal justice, overriding *all merely contracted aims and purposes* and theirs were individual and contracted. Do the spiritual powers, then, never strike down the innocent? No. *The characters should themselves acknowledge the justice of their fate.* The divine order of the world does not allow of injustice. Destiny in such an order is but another name for rationality, and good a synonym for what happens.

If now, armed with the Hegelian formula and remembering that "the wisdom of a law-giver consisteth not only in a platform of justice, but in the application thereof," we adventure among the masterpieces, what success may be looked for? It is to be feared, rather than success, a desolating failure. Summon your tragedians, examine their works, exercise to the utmost your dialectical skill and show us how *The Persians* or *The Seven against Thebes* displays the collision between two ethical powers, both good, both equally justified, or the *Œdipus*, the *Ajax*, the *Medea*, the *Ion*, *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Othello*, acknowledged glories all of dramatic art. Or abide by Hegel's own choice and select

the *Antigone* to show the principle at work. It exhibits, he claimed, his doctrine to perfection. *In the view of the Eternal Justice both Creon and Antigone were wrong because they were one-sided; but at the same time both were right.* And how is this finding upheld? By a misinterpretation of the play, a distortion of the author's intention distressingly complete.[1] At a law of poetry to which the world's greatest poets have never submitted, a dramatic principle ignored by the wonder-workers in this art, we cannot, perhaps, sufficiently marvel. The philosopher among the poets—how strange a figure he presents! How magisterial and yet how ill at ease! Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, there they are in session and the poets are arraigned before them. Yet as Sophocles before his judges, when it was charged against him that he was incapable of managing his affairs, replied by a recitation of the famous chorus in the *Coloneus*, then just completed, and so silenced his accusers into admiration, the poets answer the like accusation not by arguments but by works of beauty so exalted as to wither all criticism and strike philosophy dumb. They have an advantage as mountaineers.

> "None can usurp this height
> But those to whom the miseries of the world
> Are misery, and will not let them rest."

You need not doubt, it is no discovery, that the

[1] See for this *The Antigone*, ed. by R. C. Jebb. (Cambridge University Press.) Also *Goethe's Conversations with Eckermann.*

conflict between two powers both good, is matter for tragedy among other heavy matters. The unanswerable complaints against Hegel are two—first, that when all limitations, qualifications, defences have been advanced, it remains beyond denial that he set forth his doctrine categorically and with deliberation as the principle in chief illustrated by tragedy ; the second, that it was not forced upon him by a study of the masterpieces, but by him senselessly clamped upon them, or those of them which seemed to offer the least resistance, at the demand of his philosophy.

Who then are the sentimentalists ? Æschylus and Shakespeare, who look life in the face and accept things as they are, or the philosophers who shelter themselves from the storm behind the wall of a theory ?

Reflect upon this opinion and you are tempted to prefer any alternative. Hegel's Olympians, the spiritual principles he exalts, have power at the cost of human suffering to end but not, it seems, to prevent the conflict their division creates—in divine powers a displeasing, not to say, singular, disability. They are, then, in this affair either helpless or inhuman, or is there a third alternative ? You are anxious to push the inquiry further. Let us consult the oracle. Ah ! It grows late, the Pythia has descended from the tripod and the high-priest gone in to supper with the god.

In tragedy, and herein lies, perhaps, its major intellectual interest, the respective creeds of poet and philosopher rise into full view. The optimists, Aristotle and Hegel, perceive that it stands across their path, that against the allurements of their metaphysic the poets stand firm. The pessimists, on the other hand, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, are not, as might be too hastily assumed, in better case. To them also tragedy flings a challenge. There resides in it an unsubdued and unmanageable element, a perplexing and ironical factor. But we are for the moment their masters and these great men must wait their turn. In the face of tragedy, which shows us the terror as well as the beauty of the world, marshalling, as it does, the whole army of rebellious facts—unreason, injustice, disaster, pain—we can understand Hegel's concern, his uneasiness, his troubled search for a sign of victory. It evades him ; the sky is bare of omens. In this extremity the poets are directed to subscribe to his conclusions or, as penalty, declared to mislead us—*These are the wretched inventions of poets.* If Antigone and Œdipus were admitted to be innocent sufferers the spectacle would be, as Aristotle also believed, too horrible ; it would never do. The stage rejects drama which tortures rather than pleases and no genius can reconcile us to so repulsive a tale. A fragile argument, you may possibly think, and adduce many contrary instances, the *Trojan*

Women or *Medea*, but at least it is true that few poets have dared to present such subjects. To make them acceptable, indeed, demands a master. The other, the moral objection, you will allow to be more serious. The suffering and blameless creature is a reproach to the Creator, and gives the pessimist occasion for his impieties, his bitter references to

"Whatever brute and blackguard made the world."

If these epithets are in any degree justified the scandal must, for the sake of the simple, be hushed up. But how? By the enunciation of a principle. *A character which is dramatic plucks for itself the fruit of its own deeds.* "*Dramatic?*" You observe that word narrows the issue and forbids tragedy to be a mirror of life. In life we may fail to see how all that happens to a man springs from his own actions, and some observers have had the hardihood to maintain the contrary; in drama select the events with sufficient care and it may be made plausible or plain. If Euripides declines the prescribed task, or fails to persuade us, we must write him down an inferior dramatist. The net is agreeably spread; the tragedian with thoughtful courtesy invited to step out of the world's bleak air into the warm, well-lighted, comfortable parlour of the philosopher.

No! These restrictions are not to be borne,

nor Brahminical laws imposed on the free commonwealth of the arts. Yet, though only by the greatest successfully sustained, there is a burden to which the tragic poets submit themselves, among human undertakings perhaps the most singular—they must make *Sorrow fair, Passion wise,* and *Tears a delightful thing.*

XXXVIII. THE CENTRAL ISSUE

So much at least is clear, the interest of the philosophers in tragic drama secures for it more than a literary importance. At this point poetry finds itself in the best company, and shouldering with them old Atlas' burden of an inscrutable world makes, *nemine contradicente*, its most serious contribution to thought.

Humanity, and over against humanity nature—to throw a bridge across the chasm between its frail ideals and her vast, stablished fabric, *flammantia mœnia mundi*, on this task the reflective mind, poet's or philosopher's, has been long enough and earnestly enough engaged. That we are in some real and positive sense aliens, strangers in the world, is manifest ; ignorant as a traveller might be of a country not his own, uncertain of its government and polity, suspicious of its customs, mistrustful of its justice. Yet, to be sure, we are on the other hand in some measure naturalized and at home. Here we are, and to be alive seems of all things the most simple, ordinary, natural, and least in need of explanation. Looking round him on the planet he inhabits no one is wholly at a loss, nor could we, if our surroundings were out-

right hostile, so much as exist. Nature has her friendly side, since there appears in her, as the cautious Hume himself allowed, something analogous to mind, inducing confidence in her operations. *God is either intelligence or something in its neighbourhood*, as Aristotle has it. Nature appears to think, or, if that be too strong a word, act as if she had thoughts, which shine through the body of the world as through the physical acts of a man. The *creature hath a purpose, and its eyes are bright with it;* not ours possibly, our minds seeming to be rather a distant echo of hers or, as the Stoics thought, a fragment broken off from her larger understanding. Yet if intelligence be not in the order of the world 'tis strange that it should be in us who belong to that order; and, if possible, stranger still to meet with thinkers who derive the eye from what it observes, who first empty nature of mind and then proceed with confidence to explain everything by means of it. A certain splendour at least, a certain intelligibility in nature's handiwork only the hardest hearts will deny. Of her mechanics and mathematics, her arts and architecture, we can after all make, or fancy we can make, something. But step from the region of the insulated understanding into that of the sentient soul. How sudden a cooling of the temperature! We have left the southern slopes and are within the Arctic circle, cheerless, icy, barren. Here sympathy be-

tween nature and ourselves comes abruptly to an end. Her aims, if she has any, are difficult to ascertain, do not appear to include human happiness, and that she has a watchful care over the good and just is a proposition difficult to establish. Man's pains and pleasures, his aspirations and ideals, his affections, his right and wrong, his justice—of this language it would appear she understands not a syllable, as uncomprehending or inattentive to the voices of the living as to the speechless company of the dead. This is the great divide, *the extreme of all perplexity*, the ultimate contradiction—a world that satisfies one part of our being and disgusts another, delights the imagination and depresses the heart, contents the mind and bewilders the conscience.

> "Ah, child! she cries, that strife divine,
> Whence was it, for it is not mine?"

Nature "contradicts itself directly, according as it speaks from the individual or the universal, from within or without, from the centre or the periphery." From one point the individual is everything, from the other nothing. *Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie.* Or employ another figure. Nature's children, the scientific story goes, have outstripped their mother's primitive disposition, developed altogether beyond her spiritual sight, discovered in themselves aptitudes, interests, affections, occupations, aims, incomprehensible and foreign

to her dull and stolid temperament. So, neglected or forgotten, exposed to every hazard, their cries of need or tears of pain unheeded by her, small wonder that they have become—what now they are. There is another and contrary text from which eloquent discourses have been preached, that

> "The Being that is in the clouds and air,
> That is in the green leaves among the groves,
> Maintains a deep and reverential care
> For the unoffending creatures whom he loves."

It is magnificent, but shall we borrow a word from the eighteenth century and say *enthusiastic*? Believe it or not, divines, philosophers, poets, we know their differences but we know, too, that the broad issue with which they are concerned, the source of their anxious amazement, the substance of their common problem—how sad-hearted is the world, and how many sufferers it contains—is the same for all observers, familiar, eloquent and in no need of exposition. "If our life were endless and painless," as Schopenhauer says, "it would probably occur to no one to ask why the world exists." But where are we to look for the strangers to pain? "There came upon me," said Xerxes, when Artabanus found him in tears as he gazed upon the shore and every plain about Abydos thronged with his incalculable armies, "a sudden pity, when I thought of the shortness of man's life, and considered that of all this host, so numerous

as it is, not one will be alive when a hundred years are gone by." "And yet there are sadder things in life than that," replied Artabanus, "short as our time is, there is no man, whether it be here among the multitude or elsewhere, who is so happy as not to have felt the wish, I will not say once, but full many a time, that he was dead rather than alive." "For all men," said Scott, never to be numbered among the whimperers, "there have been times when they would have been willing to throw away life as a child does a broken toy. I am sure I know one who has often felt so." The simple old-fashioned statement of Herodotus or the personal confession of Scott will serve as well as more elaborate forms of the indictment to set forth the common, undisputed creed, pagan and Christian, that life is not so much a pursuit of pleasure as a flight from pain—the only creed to which Saint Vincent's famous words apply, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.*

There are moralists we know, both good and kind, sufferers from some obscure distemper of the mind, who make submission to an unjust sentence a virtue, if not a piece of piety, and affect a superior if icy form of consolation. What happens to Antigone, to Hamlet, to Cordelia does not matter! What they are—resolute, high-minded, self-sacrificing—suffices. Inasmuch as they possess the noble qualities it is of no momentous consequence that

the possessors perish or are unjustly served. That is to say, the virtues are to be esteemed above the virtuous and man was made for the Sabbath. We are to deny our affections and turn our backs upon our natural sympathies. Hearts are broken, heavenly creatures destroyed, the best in the world is often vanquished by the worst. In the presence of these disappointments we are to reflect that the radiance of virtue cannot be quenched, truth is its own buckler and justice a judge in unending session. "I tell thee again," wrote Carlyle, with a vehemence that heightened as his doubt increased, "there is nothing else but justice. One strong thing I find here below, the just thing, the true thing." Comfortable speeches! But where in the world, then, do the poets find subjects for their tragedies? Let us have patience: these are the *noble untruths* of good men. Others again, though you must not include among them the poets, declare themselves satisfied when a century, ten centuries, later the historian lights upon the truth that his enemies misjudged the man, the lie which did its work was a lie. Justice is vindicated, the truth prevails. Yes, doubtless, "When none cares whether it prevail or not." Less ease of mind is found among the poets and their pupils. They may admire but, by reason of some poverty of imagination, cannot betake themselves to this mount of vision, or to those still more elevated

philosophers, the favourites of the gods, called by them to sit above the clouds and to see the world *sub specie æternitatis*; to whom, as to Spinoza, *the God-intoxicated man*, the good news is vouchsafed that evil is the vulgar and mistaken name for good. In plague, earthquake, famine, which only cease for lack of victims; in hate, lust, cruelty, massacre, they discern no reality. The castaways, the imbeciles, the lepers, the distorted minds in distorted bodies, the madhouse and the jail are excellent, and right and consoling. This is to make of the Creator an archimime, or chief of the jesters, and is very well if it were altogether a matter of words, but things in our experience are knives and have a cutting edge.

> "If thou hast any tidings, pray deliver them as a man of this world."

When such philosophers deny reality to evil the common man wonders, and may be excused for wondering, whether it was not of good they were thinking. Have the tragic poets raised a false alarm and has mankind been for so long and sternly engaged against a shadow? Thus in the interests of the Absolute to belittle the individual, thus in the manner of Hegel to free the world of its ills with a pontifical benediction, thus to ignore the obvious, that tragedy is built upon the tragic, and in full flight from the distasteful facts present us with a

formula—what is this but another of those half-pitiful, half-desperate attempts to cut the Gordian knot with the rusty sword of Heraclitus ?—*Men deem some things right and others wrong, but to God all things are beautiful and good and right.* How much he knows ! And the profit to man of this knowledge ? Well, the same profit as has the wealth of Crœsus for the beggar of to-day. To this revelation, and many more of the same mystical and metaphysical altitude, tragedy is itself the answer. But you mistake, they tell us, " These disharmonies, these appearances belong to the time-order, and reality is in its true nature timeless." We know, we know ; yet are we not ourselves in time ? " I meddle not at present with Infinity and Eternity ; when I can comprehend them I will talk about them." When we have said our say and come to the end of our eloquence our world remains here and now : the only values are human values : and our interest in them alone makes things profitable or unprofitable, good or bad, desirable or undesirable. For other worlds, when we find ourselves there, other laws, other values, other interests if you will. By comparison with these soaring and aristocratic doctrines, the poet's is of humble birth.

" Things may be as I behold
Or may not be, but, without me and above me, things there are :
I myself am what I know not—ignorance which proves no bar

To the knowledge that I am, and, since I am, can recognize
What to me is pain and pleasure; this is sure, the rest—
surmise."

In sober truth if we could converse on these great issues with the tragic poets, with Æschylus or Shakespeare, would they not say—"Well, if evil be an illusion, we are constrained to call it a particularly violent, aggressive and overwhelming illusion, to all seeming as substantial as the good; and if the universe be perfect, as you tell us—an interesting hypothesis—the evidence for its perfection, wherever you have found it, has escaped our observation. Let us abide by the verdict of Socrates—*Evils, Theodorus, can never pass away, for there must always remain something which is antagonistic to good.*" [1]

[1] Plato—*Theatetus*, 176.

XXXIX. THE POETS' CREED

"I cannot place, as is always done, the fundamental difference of all religions in the question whether they are monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, or atheistic, but only in the question whether they are optimistic or pessimistic." The contention—Schopenhauer's—touches poetry. Is there a poetic creed, optimistic or pessimistic, a religion common to the poets? Without a doubt. It is after all a world of persons, they say, (Ah! How interesting!) and the great Reality, whatever it be, either consists of them or has been at some pains to spin itself into individuals, which argues for them, on either hypothesis, all the importance there seems to be in time or out of it. "God," said Roger Bacon, *the admirable Doctor*, "has not created this world for the sake of the universal man, but for the sake of individual persons." To employ the image of Plotinus, the great globe of the universe is figured over with the countenances of living creatures, and if there be any other language than theirs poetry knows nothing of it. In a bold metaphor she may say of herself, *Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto.* With Christianity, poetry refuses to subordinate the individual to any

scheme and, believing that *in our life alone doth nature live*, finds nothing of value that undervalues him. Differences make the world and in them, not in identity, reality resides. For her the thing is the idea. You may imagine her occupied with beauty. No, only with beautiful objects, acts or persons; never with abstractions, but persistently with Miguel de Unamuno's man, not the *ζῷον πολιτικόν*, or *Homo economicus* or *Homo sapiens*, in which science and philosophy have their portion, but with "the man of flesh and blood; the man who is born, suffers, and dies—above all who dies; the man who eats and drinks and plays and sleeps and thinks and wills, the man who is seen and heard." Poetry is anthropocentric, and so perhaps disappointingly child-like. Where philosophy opens the book of concepts, religion the book of revelation, for the poets, more solicitous about the fate of persons than of ideas, the book of this man's hopes, fears, aspirations, affections, remains the only ancient, authorized, authentic and sacred text. The individual is the Absolute of poetry. *Homo sacra res homini.* Necessarily, therefore, she lends a careless ear to the tales of that other Absolute, the grand Vacuity, the Whole contemptuous of its parts, the One who never had—or has lost—consciousness and eccentrically distributes to the Many what he lacks himself; who sits dazed in the midst of his works, who is neither for us nor against us,

whose attributes are the subject of protracted and inconclusive debate, whose existence makes no difference and unless propped by arguments appears on the point of collapse; the unedifying idol, whose chief use this many an age has been to serve as a philosopher's model, sometimes majestically draped as *Νοῦς*, sometimes as Will, sometimes as Energy, Space-Time, Motion or Fire—*quædam simulacra modis pallentia miris.*

"Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end."

Reality? To what strange uses we put our words! What is real to me in my friend? That he is like all else an illusory and transient appearance of some other and more fundamental reality? How does that endear him to me or give him interest above other men? For the poets at least, however it be with philosophers, things are what they are; it is a "world not of philosophical abstraction, but of perception, of seas and sunsets, trees and flowers, men and women, riches and poverty, cities and villages, kings and popes and members of parliament; the real world of history and natural history, politics, literature and life." You may reject them, but you will not easily dislodge Sophocles or Shakespeare from their human home, nor win them to side, for example, with those mystics of a curious inconsistency, who look upon the body as a check or drag rather than as an instrument and,

better pleased apparently with the Creator than His creation, would have us thankful to escape to Him from His unhappy world and lose the self He fashioned for, it would seem, no better use than in an ecstasy to have it abandoned with all convenient speed. "As though it were the highest glory of man, forgetting all that his inquiry has achieved, hidden away from the world—to gaze at vacancy, inactive and infantine;—to be like some peasant's child left in its cradle for a while in the furrow of a field, shut in by the little mound of earth on either side, and having but the blue æther above, dazzling and void, at which to look up with smiles of witless wonder."

"The chief objection I have to pantheism," remarks Schopenhauer, "is that it says nothing. To call the world *God* is not to explain it; it is only to enrich our language with a superfluous synonym for the word *world*." Exactly: it does not deny God, it merely vaporizes Him. And if you let your thoughts wander in this void and conjecture the Demiurge to be a child at play, or assume that this Potter working, as some say, in a dream, breaks the pots He has made, as well ask the poet's worship for Xerxes at Thermopylæ, where Leonidas in defeat snatched all the glory from his victorious foe, as for so hollow a divinity. The poet's sympathy, whatever it be worth, will be with the hero of the world's tragedy, the victim thrown for no discoverable end to the wolf, Neces-

sity. *Victrix causa deis placuit sed victa Catoni.* Let us be honest. Whose welfare are we considering? At the root of all speculation our concern is not for the universe, which—it has been courageously conjectured—is safe, but for ourselves. "I love and honour my own soul, and have methinks two arms too few to embrace myself." And the attempts to describe a circle without a centre, to make honey by a blending of sweet words, having seen, to say of the eye, "I have no need of thee"—these are ingenious occupations but foreign to poetry. She recalls one of the few facts that no philosophy can shake—evidence outside consciousness for the existence of anything is nowhere to be found. Where all is perplexed, she believes herself then on firmer ground with the individual, who is at all events the door of entrance and the door of exit, both debtor and creditor, loser and gainer, with whom all inquiry, knowledge, vision begins and ends, to whom the arguments are invariably addressed, by whom the issues are weighed, the verdicts given, whose eye calls all things into being, who assigns to nature her laws, by him discovered and alone discoverable. Reject this guide, she reminds us, and logic has no sense, beauty no interest, science no existence. It is doubtless an inconvenience, but there is no higher court to which you can carry your contentions, mathematical or metaphysical. If he be

mistaken or deceived—a further exasperation—none but himself can bring the error to light. And if we are to trust our latest guides, the Relativists, he carries with him his own space and time and makes a ghost of their more ancient, larger and independent claims. *Omne individuum ineffabile.* Observe him, this upright, incorruptible justiciar as he gravely ponders the many and weighty arguments for his own illusoriness. It is a curious spectacle, for he is himself the unshakable One, the only valid existence. If, however, you know of another by whom his judicial dignity, his prerogative, his monopoly can be challenged, the news will, perhaps, reach us and —he will give the claim his impartial consideration.

If this be, as it is in effect, *ταῦτα ἢ τοιαῦτα*, their creed, the poets may be pardoned a preference for what they know in some sense to what is in no sense known, for the present obvious and precious person to the obscure and conjectured essence of the whole. The spiritual principle to which our loyalty is due—where is it to be seen at work except among men? Not until he finds it within him does he search for it without. "Just as a sailor sits in a boat trusting to his frail bark in a stormy sea, unbounded in every direction, rising and falling with the howling mountainous waves; so in the midst of a world of sorrows the individual man sits quietly, supported by and trusting to the *principium individuationis*, or the way in which the individual knows things as phenomena."

XL. SCHOPENHAUER ON TRAGEDY

Upon the well-contents, the philosophers lost in admiration of the world's perfection, the tragic poets might possibly cast such a glance as Dido's upon Æneas in the shades, to avert it in disdain.

> "Illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat,
> Nec magis incepto vultum sermone movetur,
> Quam si dura silex aut stet Marpesia cautes."

There are others, however, the malcontents, the pessimists, with whom it might be supposed they were in intimate and friendly agreement. The Governor of Solomon's House, Bacon tells us, *had a look as if he pitied men*, and though in a perfect world there seems logically little room for pity, with philosophers of the opposite persuasion from Hegel, like Schopenhauer, not convinced of its perfection, the tragedians appear at first sight to have, and have, indeed, more in common.

We are wrong to suppose that tourists upon the same road perceive the same scenery. Among philosophic travellers, to the surprised amusement of those who do not much affect their company, nothing could be further from the truth. Among them there is no unanimity of eye, no harmony of vision. "If one knocked on the graves," says

Schopenhauer, "and asked the dead whether they would wish to rise again, they would shake their heads." What was for Leibnitz the best of all possible worlds was for that great and unhappy intelligence the worst; a colony of "constantly needy creatures, who continue for a time only by devouring one another, whose life is an unceasing struggle for existence, forced upon them by a blind will to live, in which nothing is certain but irremediable defeat, the utter and final shipwreck of death." "At last death must conquer; for by the very fact of birth we are made over to him, and he is only playing awhile with his prey before he swallows it." And if it be asked, "why call deliverance a shipwreck, or bemoan the end of so anxious and painful a voyage?"—an awkward question—he answers, "because it ends only to begin once more;" because it is impossible to atone that inexplicable blunder, the crime of crimes rather, of permitting ourselves to be born. Or if not outright impossible, possible only for him who, unaided by friendly gods and braced solely by his self-taught, superhuman resolution, utterly destroys desire and disengages his will from the struggle. From his wanderings in time that fortunate traveller returns home, reaching at last the wished-for bourne of bliss, of blessed Nothingness, *the land where all things are forgot.*

The argument, it may be, trips a little, but let

it pass unchallenged. Let us allow Schopenhauer his premiss. We are all the time "unprofitably travelling towards the grave." "Birth, decay, death, grief, lamentation, despair all come to an end only with the annihilation of desire, the will to live." *Je ne sais pas ce que c'est que la vie éternelle, mais celle-ci est une mauvaise plaisanterie*, quotes Schopenhauer from Voltaire with approval, and he also sees life, we might say, as a jest carried too far, finding neither in the present nor in the eternal recurrence, in the reincarnation of the human spirit, any promise of Elysium, of happiness to compensate its pains. "Human life must be some kind of mistake;" the world steadily viewed is a scene from the *Inferno*. Within this sombre frame, then, whatever its philosophical value, it might seem an easy task to accommodate tragedy. Yet there emerges from it a peculiar embarrassment. To Hegel, as we have seen, tragedy offers little anxiety. We but wrap ourselves momentarily in gloom the better to enjoy the eternal sunshine. If, on the other hand, the world be, as Schopenhauer insists, a penal colony, an *ἐργαστήριον*, bathed as it were in pain, and we evil spirits, suffering here for our extraordinary and heinous lapse into birth, why being in such miserable case should we call to mind and accentuate sufferings already beyond endurance? Why double our griefs and be at further pain to stage the most depressing scenes from the pande-

monium we inhabit? Yet further—most inexplicable of all acts—why contemplate them with satisfaction, while we revere and crown with garlands their heartless contrivers? This is a surprising madness. Tragic writers should, like Phrynichus, fined by the Athenians for his *Capture of Miletus*, which recalled to them their griefs, be exposed in Schopenhauer's world to punishment not praise. So logic surely would dictate and institute against tragedy an ordinance in defence of suffering humanity. What then hinders? Schopenhauer's acute mind perceived the difficulty. The pleasure derived from tragic drama was too open and palpable a fact to be set entirely aside. Of ancient lineage and long in possession of the field, for its place in history and the human heart a justification or explanation was required. There, demanding an answer wholly different from Aristotle's, who believed that *life, though no good should go with it, is desirable for itself*, wholly different, also, from Hegel's, in whose universe all is to be praised and nothing to be censured, the problem, which is our own, awaited his solution. In what did the pleasure of tragedy consist, for what were the tragic poets to be honoured? In this strange art we are brought, he tells us, face to face, with the terrible facts of existence, the unspeakable miseries, the triumph of evil, the tyranny of chance, the pitiable destruction of the guiltless. To these it

gives their proper prominence. Yes, so far we can follow him. And then? Well, art frees us from the servitude of the will and our pleasure is that in tragedy we see its heroes, the highest and noblest of human creatures, abandon after long conflict and unhappiness the unequal struggle, renounce their vain and wilful ambitions, at last freely and joyfully surrender their once cherished lives. And we, the spectators of that conflict and that surrender, are by them equally persuaded of life's vanity, and ourselves are moved to a similar disengagement of the will to live, to like renunciation and like resignation.

In all this it is not so much Schopenhauer's ingenuity as his sincerity that impresses us. Nor is he altogether wrong. In despair, so it be complete, there resides a kind of relief, a refuge for the mind. Nothing can be worse than the worst and death has been by men

> "Oft invok'd,
> With vows as their chief good and final hope."

We have to reckon, also, with that horror of existence, felt by many sensitive souls in all ages, the sea-sick voyagers, like Tolstoy and Hardy in our own, afflicted with a kind of vertigo by its stupendous rhythms, the rise and fall of its high ocean waves. The matron Melancholy prefers intellectual society and marks for her own men of superior

mental powers, who make at times a lachrymose and more than necessary to-do over their afflictions. *Aristoteles ait omnes ingeniosos melancholicos esse.* Earth's old and generous wine easily loses its bouquet and becomes for them a sour vintage; as it has become with the tired races of the East, the Defeatists, whose infected airs impoverish the vitality of the West, who desire nothing better than to join the dark and secret society of the dead. "Our suffering," writes Schopenhauer with his usual and pointed simplicity, "always arises from the want of agreement between our wishes and the course of the world." From what else indeed? And the East argues, therefore, that our wishes must be abandoned, the West that the course of the world must be changed. The former proposes surrender, the latter, buoyed by some mystic hope or sustained by a singular hardihood, counsels unending war upon the enemies of human happiness. Schopenhauer, rejoicing "In the sublime attractions of the grave," has no encouragement in his voice. A disciple of the East, an *occidental Buddhist*, adopting the wisdom of Silenus, *optimum non nasci, aut cito mori*, he chooses, or gives out that he chooses, the unheroic way. Like those who deny immortality because they despair of it, having abandoned hope, he becomes the eulogist of failure. The lesson of tragedy is, therefore, the worthlessness, the absurdity of life, the pain of

personality, the glory of death, the joy of defeat. Tragedy is the hymn of the fugitive.

Postpone for the present the consideration of this thesis and accord to Schopenhauer the praise of his deserving. Whether or not we accept his opinion of Spinoza as a sophist and Hegel as a vulgar charlatan—and the friends of the tragic poets are under no obligation to become their allies—he has stronger claims on our attention than his light-hearted predecessors. He is so far right that, if immortality be untrue, we are left with a world in which one would not wish it to be true or desire for it an unlimited continuance. For him at least tragedy is not a toy to pass the time, it has a profound significance and reflects "the giant agony of the world." As you read Schopenhauer you are never asked to throw away your sense. He is a philosopher who eschews jargon and writes to be understood. He has other modes of defence than a retreat into obscurity. His taste and judgment, too, in art and literature induce confidence when he turns to larger themes. You are not required, as with some of the others, to believe his metaphysic inspired because his æsthetic is manifestly insupportable. Chiefly, perhaps, his human heartedness, devoid of which no doctrine deserves human consideration, augments his reader's trust ; his sense of justice, too, his hatred of cruelty, his consuming sympathy with animals. Schopen-

hauer has the heart of a poet, to which Spinoza, if it be not unmannerly to recall it of so venerable a mystagogue, who amused his philosophic leisure by placing flies in the webs of spiders, can hardly lay claim. Our confidence is not misplaced ; on tragedy Schopenhauer writes,as on everything,with thoughtful discernment. For two things we owe him thanks, first, the acknowledgment that *the representation of a great misfortune is alone essential to tragedy* ; second, that the just and innocent overtaken by calamity are tragic cases—*In what has Ophelia, Desdemona or Cordelia offended ?* How curiously simple and satisfying when we reach it, how long a journey is often necessary to overtake common sense.

With Schopenhauer the types of tragedy are three. The great calamity, its only essential, may come about through the agency of a character supremely eminent in wickedness, who touches the limit of human possibility in guilt, Iago or Creon in the *Antigone* ; or, again, through the agency of blind Fate, as in the *Œdipus Rex* ; or, lastly, through the relations in which the *dramatis personæ* stand to each other, so that out of the ordinary circumstances of life, although abnormal wickedness or blind mischance be absent, there may arise a situation which compels one man irreparably to injure or wreck another's life. Of these types he prefers the third as the most difficult of achievement and also the most terrible; since misfortunes due to

wickedness or Destiny threaten only from afar and may be escaped, but the door of such common and social entanglements as destroy human creatures stands always open, and before the tragic representations that picture such destruction *shuddering we feel ourselves already in the midst of hell.*

The world, Schopenhauer complains, is a battlefield, and hates it accordingly. This hatred of life —a point of interest for psychology—is not to be found among its soldiers, but among those who have no heart for endurance, and no stomach for its warfare, to whom all conflict is painful and peace to be purchased at any price. There are submissive and unsubmissive men and races. Among Orientals and Easternised minds like those of Euripides, Schopenhauer and Tolstoy, devouring their hearts and avoiding the ways of men, the sufferings of humanity seem almost wholly to arise from social and political disagreements. We are rightly punished because we are at variance with ourselves. Yet these, the severest critics of society and its institutions, who hate dissent, are the most violent of dissenters, least disposed to ally themselves with any cause, and inclined to denounce resistance to evil—the only remedy for it yet discovered by the world —more bitterly than the evil which calls for resistance.

Schopenhauer knocks confidently at the gate of the tragic problem. What gives to all tragedy

that singular swing towards elevation, to employ once more his own words, *is the awakening of the knowledge that the world, that life cannot satisfy us thoroughly and consequently is not worthy of our attachment.* In this *consists the tragic spirit; it, therefore, leads to resignation.* Have we here at last the truth? Schopenhauer is very sure that he has surprised the secret of tragedy, so sure that he is prepared to make the widest admissions. "I admit that in ancient tragedy this spirit of resignation seldom appears and is expressed directly. Œdipus Colonus certainly dies resigned and willing; yet he is comforted by the revenge on his country. If Iphigenia at Aulis is very willing to die; yet it is the thought of the welfare of Greece that comforts her. . . . Cassandra in the *Agamemnon* of the great Æschylus dies willingly; but she also is comforted by the thought of revenge. Hercules in the *Trachiniæ*, submits to necessity, and dies composed but not resigned. Hippolytus, like almost all the tragic heroes of the ancients, shows submission to inevitable fate and the inflexible will of the gods, but no surrender of the will to live itself. . . . Almost all show the human race under the fearful rule of chance and error, but not the resignation which is occasioned by it and delivers from it. All because the ancients had not yet attained to the summit and goal of tragedy, or indeed of the view of life itself."

How very handsome an admission and captivating an honesty! What more can we ask of any man than concessions in disproof of his own doctrine? We are to believe, then, that Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides fell short in tragedy. With lofty confidence Schopenhauer discounts their assistance. They are troublesome things, these theories. What drives Hegel to espouse, compels his successor to disapprove the ancients; where one looks for the support of the moderns, the other discards them. With the same wind their vessels sail upon opposite courses. Creon in the *Antigone* is for Hegel the champion of the state, for Schopenhauer a monster of incredible wickedness. And so it goes, each philosopher—unlike the poet, who is so simple that only subtle and learned men have a difficulty in understanding him—speaking a peculiar dialect and dwelling, as it were, in a separate labyrinth of his own construction.

So naked a folly as the total exclusion of the Attic tragedians from the account was, of course, impossible. Something of *that singular swing towards elevation* which, he well discerned, affords *an infinitely* higher kind of happiness than the sight of the happiness of the hero *however great it might be, could ever give*—to save his doctrine he concludes—must have been tasted by the beholder, something of that sublime spirit of resignation which, in its full perfection Æschylus and

Sophocles failed to provide, was felt by him; the longing for that *very comfortable state*, when like the hero he should be again as once he was—nothing. Still these ancient tragedians hardly answer expectation and were in the dark ; the true idea of tragedy, the expressive lineaments of life were unknown to them ; so we must turn to the moderns. Yet here, unhappily, when we might have anticipated the completest demonstration, our philosopher fails to do himself justice. When he might have gathered whole armfuls of tragical speeches we are dismissed with the briefest reference to Hamlet and referred for that effortless resignation, which tragic heroes and we their beholders should feel, to Bellini's Opera of *Norma*—a frail support if we are to reject Clytemnestra and Hippolytus. No ! the thesis remains unproved. The heroes of tragedy are no more willing to part with life, their all in all, than the rest of us.

Had the future been open to his view, Schopenhauer might have looked with confidence to his fellow-countryman and fellow-pessimist, Nietzsche, as a natural ally, and *The Birth of Tragedy*, a book of genius, whatever its conclusions and whatever your conclusions regarding it, owes to him beyond question its chief inspiration. But Nietzsche, that Hotspur of the mind, wears his rue with a difference and repudiates so weak a doctrine as mere resignation. *Oh ! How differently Dionysus spoke to me !*

And how differently Shakespeare, whose

> "friends are exultations, agonies,
> And love, and man's unconquerable mind,"

speaks to us. Is Macbeth, in any interpretation of the word, resigned, or Othello? Are they not, each in his own way, wrathful and indignant, the one with Fate, the other with himself? Or, if we are to consider the effect upon the spectator, does the death of Desdemona, of Hamlet, of Cordelia leave us in fact content that such beings are lost to the dwellers in time and restored to eternity, which has hardly, one supposes, a greater need of them? It is impossible not to feel surprise at the naïve simplicity of this theory. The opposite, that the heroes of tragedy, ancient or modern, affirm, if we are to employ this terminology, rather than deny the will to live, appears to stand better; that they are neither themselves resigned nor leave the beholder resigned, who finds them of an incomparable vitality, at a good distance from Schopenhauer's mood of withered submission, and more akin in spirit to the legendary Berserkers, who die if they must only since surrender they will not.

Schopenhauer's cardinal error is patent enough; he judges others by himself and former ages by his own. And Nietzsche too,—his thesis requires it—tells us the Greeks were pessimists. Well, yes, of a variety and if the pessimist be distinguished among other men by his enormous zest for life,

by his passion for prowess, for personal beauty, for athletics, for success and all the prizes of the world; if he be an untired and untiring man of extraordinary briskness and vivacity and of glory greatly desirous, as was Themistocles for the renown of Miltiades, *which would not let him sleep;* if it be consistent with a race of pessimists that they should make gods of their fighters and fighters of their gods. Shakespeare's Englishmen were pessimists of the same brand; "the indescribable gusto of the Elizabethan voice" proclaims it, the spring and buoyancy of their speech—

> "Be stirring with the morrow, gentle Norfolk."

The impetuous ardour of Hotspur, "he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast washes his hands and says to his wife,—*Fie upon this quiet life! I want work;*" the exuberant spirit of Falstaff, with his enthusiasm of welcome for a combat of words or any spicy adventure; the ringing rhetoric of that darling of the groundlings, the English king, who cries to his *band of brothers*—

> "This day is called the feast of Crispian;
> He that outlives this day and comes safe home,
> Shall stand on tiptoe when this day is named.
> And gentlemen of England now abed
> Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
> And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
> That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day."

These men were no doubt pessimists. But they

seem to have had mounting spirits and an amazing care for the things of this world, and how then are we to describe the optimists? As men who had less care for them? Inasmuch as Schopenhauer has a quarrel with this troublesome business of living, the Athenians and Elizabethans for whom the masterpieces were written, and to whom they gave delight, had the same quarrel, shared his repugnance to existence and desired deliverance from its sorrows and absurdities. He supposes this to have been the mood of men who, so far from belonging to epochs in human history of despondency and disillusion, had the fortune to live not in the trough but on the summit of life's wave; in times—a pertinent matter this—conspicuous for achievement and abounding in hope; of men who had just returned victorious from Marathon and the defeat of Spain's Great Armadas, not at all accustomed to ponder on the vanity of things; men

"With ladies' faces and fierce dragons' spleens,"

mad with pride, or we are much mistaken, walking on air, if ever men walked on air, each a god, like a surf-rider, exultant, standing in broad sunlight on a superb and galloping ocean steed. How surprising, then, is his illusion! If it escape all others his vessel shatters irretrievably upon this reef.

Look once more at this great tragedy and at that, *Agamemnon* or *Othello*, and observe the simple if unlooked for fact—the nearer it approaches perfection and achieves its end, the more through and by means of it

"We feel that we are greater than we know."

The mere spectacle of mutability in human affairs, of sorrow, disaster or a broken heart is powerless to produce such a conviction, nor have the agitated emotions of melodrama ever carried that judgment on their highest crests. To pluck it from the heart of failure is tragedy's peculiarity. The infirmity of our daily thought is the opportunity of the poet, and when, stealing gradually upon us, or driven home by a single stroke of excellent behaviour, this persuasion enters and warms the mind, when from a scene of desolation we extract an inner satisfaction, from a vision of weakness power, from defeat an incomprehensible presentiment of triumph, we judge tragedy to have attained the fulness of its natural stature. That in all ages and countries it shuns the lower levels and looks for an element of greatness, that the protagonist is preferred illustrious, of high estate, requires this or some better interpretation. The artist is preferred in his greatest work and life, too, best pleases us in its critical hours and in men their equals. And the tragic conflict of which we hear so much from

the critics, wherein lies its necessity? "Behold," says Seneca, if a rhetorician at least a good one, "a sight worthy to be viewed by a god, a brave man struggling with adversity." And again, "I should not be surprised if the gods sometimes experience a wish to behold great men struggling with some misfortune." Such a sight the gods may well desire; for though heaven is the poorer that it cannot provide adversity and they—above both victory and defeat—unhappy that they are not called upon to face death, and though, too, as everyone knows, it is easier to die well than to live well, that struggle provides an incomparable exhilaration. And will anyone tell us how greatness is to be known where littleness is impossible, or upon what other foundation greatness in defeat can base itself than upon greatness in conflict? The law lies in the nature of things, that they are as they are, though some tragic artists are prone to overlook that necessity, and it be a fault in one of our own, Hardy, that his heroes lack the elevation, the fighting strength that claims the admiration of the sleeping hero in every man, who would willingly, I do not say submit to, but undertake the heroic part, were it only a thought easier, a trifle less hazardous. For if all who worship heroes were themselves heroic their armies might "set black streamers in the firmament" and march with Tamburlaine against the powers of heaven. Human society, however, consists

neither of heroes nor philosophers, but of very simple souls, birds flying unquestioning through life, and if to the finer harmonies of beauty few are attuned, fewer still are indifferent to greatness, which in all its shapes and manifestations magically lifts the weakest beholders to the summit on which they gaze. Beauty, nobility, grace, splendour, intensity, energy, resolution—these are in fact, though how to interpret their presence in the world we are at a loss, the world's unceasing demand, and the better if, in the hero of tragedy, they appear in his evil and overwhelming hour; best of all if in that hour he can make his bow to death or disaster, as do the heroes of the Sagas, *with a lifting of the heart;* or like Taillefer, Cleaver of Iron, first of the Normans to ride into Senlac fight and to die there, who signified the lightness of his mind by tossing his sword in air, the while he sang of Roncesvalles, of Roland and of Oliver. They, too, had died hard. The breed is to be judged by its finest exemplar, by a character who stands at bay with the situation. *The home-tarriers and house doves* are not for this assay, which requires some worthy antagonist of destiny. With the greatness, which turns defeat into a victory shared by the spectator, *nos exæquat victoria cælo*, imagination keeps us in step. A candidate for our despairing sympathy, who bears because there is nothing else to be done, has no standing in tragedy. But Medea, Tambur-

laine, Macbeth remain, blood-thirsty, mad, mistaken, before whose crimes the stars tremble in their courses. The heroes of dramas like these may well disturb the delicate balance of a doctrine like Hegel's, yet no one refuses them his sympathy. That they have taken the wrong turning is forgotten; their undertakings, furious, hateful, bitter, are set aside, for we are warmed by their fire, a double portion of her own granted them by nature, and would borrow on our journey through this world, and if we could beyond it, a measure of their unflinching resolution. There is no denying that our affections suffer violence and the violent take them by force. If the race has outgrown their insanities we trust that it has not at the same time outgrown their iron strength.

Do you suspect a sophistry or contradiction here, such as Schiller thought himself to have discovered between the moral and the æsthetic judgment, an approval won from you against conscience? There is no need for a pusillanimous ethic. Though the Puritan could not bring himself to believe it, there are many good things in the world beside goodness, and we may even without alarm admit that there is, as Hazlitt wrote, a principle in man, "which makes him read with admiration, and reconciles him in fact, to the triumphant progress of the conquerors and mighty Hunters of Mankind." Two strands are twisted here. What the æsthetic

judgment approves is desirable, what the moral judgment approves equally so. We approve—'tis a daily discrimination with us—of men we know and at the same time disapprove. Clytemnestra's, Macbeth's strength, courage, will, imagination are all admirable, we desire them for ourselves; their inhumanity, ah! that we hate. But what is there strange and baffling in such division of the mind? There is nothing more common, natural and just. Magnitude wherever seen is a magnet and love of its *abstemious intoxication*—thank the gods!—as incurable as the attraction of the lesser to the greater everywhere, of the earth to the sun.

Pass to another point of observation and examine your pleasure in tragedy of a different type, the romantic. What is at the root of your inward and spiritual contentment with *Romeo and Juliet*? Surely the same; that here, too, you feel yourself superior to yourself, and read into it a passion of fulfilment rather than an image of despair, perceiving that even in so common a matter as the loves of boy and girl the angel in them shows his wings.

For the interest of tragedy is in no small measure the interest of heroic story heightened by defeat, the history of an excellence we desire to keep alive, whose passing we deplore and admire the more passionately for its departure. "I would not give my dead son," said the Duke of Ormond, "for the best living son in Christendom."

XLI. NIETZSCHE'S *BIRTH OF TRAGEDY*

Nietzsche repudiates, in that famous cardinal theory of his, the moral interpretation of life, the interpretation so familiar, so native to our souls, as we thought, the use of the moral balance in which goodness outweighs anything that can be placed in the scale against it ; the notion, that is, of morality as something fixed, not of our making, eternal in value. Christianity, too, with its refusal to employ any other measure, its insistence everywhere on moral values, on Christianity in *The Birth of Tragedy* he preserves, in his own phrase, *a deep hostile silence* and recognizes only *an altogether thoughtless and immoral artist god.* For there, in Christian ethic, as he held, we have nothing better than an extravagant burlesque of the moral interpretation, or worse than that, a slander on the world, born of a nausea of life and a deep fear of beauty ; a symptom in fact of the most fatal disease, *exhaustion*, a form of the *will to perish.* The notion that life can be given a meaning, in some degree rendered intelligible and significant, if we think of it as an aspiration towards goodness—the Christian idea—must be set aside as a pernicious and melancholy delusion. Life is a sensual riot, a Bacchic orgy essentially

unmoral, and at the heart of this morality there lies *a secret instinct for annihilation*. For the moral, therefore, Nietzsche proposed to substitute another, the artistic interpretation or evaluation of life. To approve of the world as an æsthetic spectacle he thought possible. So regarded, as an artist views a landscape, it might be adjudged admirable, estimated, so to say, by the thrill it communicates the thrill of surprising beauty and sublimity. Much in that sense might be said in praise of life, if in no other sense. Christianity, even in its blindness, was at least dimly aware of the inherent worthlessness, the awfulness and absurdity of existence—the deepest folly could not overlook so patent a fact—but had dreamt of an escape from the prison-house by way of the moral life and some impossible other world of rewards and punishments. A cul-de-sac that! Shunning this mistaken avenue, however, and taking the way of art there came into view another outlet or exit from the valley of the shadow of despair—open, one fears, only to the elect, the metaphysicians. There is an art which mysteriously provides an exact copy or extract of life, a *hieroglyphical and shadowed lesson of the whole world*, in Sir Thomas Browne's phrase, and in Schopenhauer's view also *the metaphysical of everything physical in the world;* an art which is, indeed, simply an alternative rendering or symbolic interpretation of the universe, of the visible scene

around us. Life, we know—what need to argue the matter ?—is beyond the power of medicaments, of any restorative, is rooted in pain ; a strange plant springing from a terrible soil of primordial suffering. Out of this volcanic depth, or rising out of the very heart of the world, streaming up like a vapour from the abyss is a knowledge, intuitive and of the heart but incontrovertible, a wisdom beyond arguments that teaches the horror of existence. Veiled from sight in the other, the representative arts, it is revealed in music—that symbol or copy of reality, its thrilling pulse, as one might say, or passionate cry, the reverberating echo of its misery. Music symbolizes a sphere which is above all appearance and before all phenomena ; primary and universal it is a voice speaking from the very heart of nature. In music, then, to change the image, we have the *Dionysian mirror of the world*, which reflects truth itself. But it speaks an inarticulate language, it is a pictureless art. And over against its deeper intuitions, in opposition to it the others—the sculptor's and painter's art, the naïve art of Homer—raise up a shining world of appearances, a dream scene which arrests and enchants us by its brilliance. Illusions all, indeed, for they can provide nothing else, but entrancing illusions which master us, and in them we can take refuge. Now if we are to understand tragedy, and in no other way, Nietzsche insists, can it at all be understood,

we must regard it as the meeting place of two principles, of two types of art, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, the place of their fusion. Tragedy, tradition tells us, arose out of the chorus, the Dionysian dithyramb, a music echoing the untold, unspeakable sadness of things. But lo! before it, before the swaying crowd of Dionysian worshippers stood Apollo, radiant, "the conquering smile upon his lips"; Apollo, patron of the plastic arts, of clear-cut lovely shapes, of individual forms, of drama, and as it gazed the wisdom of Dionysus was by his magic *condensed into a shining picture*, steeped in Olympian light, reflected from the sorrowful but divine figures, the suffering but superb heroes of the tragic stage. The chorus generates the pictures—*the sufferer feels the deepest longing for beauty; he begets it*—and the heroes of tragedy, Prometheus, Œdipus, *are but masks of the original hero Dionysus*. The rational and moral world might lie dissolved in ruins, but the Apollonian art, a saving and healing enchantress, subdued and subjugated in her transfiguring mirror the dragon of despair, holding before the gaze of the spectator, after his glance into the secret and terrible abyss, the riveting images of consoling and immortal beauty. By this art were the Greeks, well aware of life's hopelessness, saved from a Buddhistic denial of the will to live: and in tragedy we have the *subjugation of the awful*, as in comedy an artistic release *from the nausea of the absurd*.

Thus Nietzsche claimed in a book which, *at any rate*, he says, *sufficed for the best of its time*, to be a discoverer; in a word, *the first tragic philosopher, that is the utmost antithesis and antipode to a pessimistic philosopher*. It may not altogether seem like it, but at least he holds to the world, if we are content, as, it seems, we should be, to live with illusions, as a sublime spectacle—*I desire thee : it is worth while to know thee.*

Thus the universal will escapes the truth by altering or translating it into a dream ; the Dionysian truth melts into the Apollonian vision. For we are not to ask of art, nor of religion either : Is it true ? but rather, Does it enable us to bear the burden of life, to sustain its battle ?

Nietzsche is not, of course, the only defender of this thesis—that without drugs the human race would long since have abandoned the unequal struggle. Consider it in this fashion. Where the vulgar fly for refuge to some oblivious antidote, some bodily intoxicant, the more delicate and refined among men decline upon that seductive poison, religion, or seek in the pursuit of knowledge, or, if lovers of beauty, in the consolations of art, or, again, if endowed with a sense of the ludicrous, in the humours of a preposterous world, an anodyne for their pain. Of these intoxicants Nietzsche chose that of art and conceived himself in this a follower of the Greeks. There is no other way to happiness than through

the gateway of illusion, and they were saved from despair by a contemplation of the dazzling Apollonian pictures, the dream figures of the tragic drama.

And our delight in tragedy—to return once again to our central problem—how simply, Nietzsche argues, it can now be accounted for. Pity and fear have as little to do with it as moral values; these are quite beside the mark. The pleasure it gives is purely æsthetic; it is a game, but a game to be played seriously. For we rejoice in the view and yet have a *longing beyond it*, exactly like a child which busily employs itself building sandhills only to overturn them again. Our instinctive and final sympathy is with the Dionysian wisdom, the bliss of collapse which frees us from personality. Here is the secret of tragedy. Over the world as we see and know it, a world torn asunder and shattered into individuals, nature laments, since that dismemberment is the very cause of our misery. And in tragedy the individual is disowned, annihilated for our pleasure. With his descent into the unconscious whence he came, the sinking of the troubled wave into the tranquil ocean depths, we experience an incomparable satisfaction. *The spectator sees before him the tragic hero in epic clearness and beauty and nevertheless delights in his annihilation. He comprehends the incidents of the scene in all their details, and yet loves to flee into the incomprehensible. He feels the actions of the hero to be justified and is nevertheless*

still more elated when these actions annihilate their originator. He shudders at the suffering *which will befall* the hero and yet *anticipates therein* a higher and much *more overpowering joy.* How are these contradictions to be resolved save by a return, after the contemplation of the glittering illusion, to the bosom of reality? *Tragedy is the art of metaphysical comfort, a metaphysical supplement to the reality of nature.*

No one will go about to deny the engaging dexterity, the brilliance of all this. Nor should we confine our admiration to its dexterity and brilliance. Nietzsche has more than sparkle, he has depth. Compared with his the rival philosophical theory of Hegel—a theory not lacking certainly in moral fibre—compared with Nietzsche's glorious metaphysical flight Hegel's doctrine seems, as indeed it is, broken-winged and pedestrian. To such a theory as Nietzsche's—and we must of course allow him his symbols—the dazzled and wondering reader feels the utmost reluctance to apply any kind of test, to ask for its relation to actual drama, how it faces the facts, or how Æschylus, for example, might have regarded it. To attempt the application of such tests seems like the inhuman effort to net and capture for the cage a many-plumaged tropic bird, a flashing vision joyous and on the wing. Yet if for any reason we falter in our acceptance a hard fate awaits us. Nietzsche condemns dissenters from his own, the true æsthetic church,

to the ministry of Gervinus in the Nonconformist chapel over the way. There, if we must, we can worship Shakespeare according to our dismal moral lights. A dread alternative! For the talent of Gervinus, though in this he is not alone among critics, lies in persuading us of his author's dulness. Yet Nietzsche, clad in glittering armour, has not only Gervinus against him, a rudely-armed peasant whom he despises, and Hegel also, for whose ethical blunderbuss he has an equal contempt; whole armies are entrenched and in opposition to his doctrine. He has much to say for himself, yet we cannot forget that time out of mind the moral values have been man's book of navigation and appear still to have their uses. Subordinate—for to proclaim or exhibit the moral order is not the function of tragedy—yet by no means to be denied. And the Greeks themselves, the light-bearers, had they in fact disentangled themselves from the net of moral prepossessions? To prove that from their tragic drama would tax the powers of a dialectician more skilful than Nietzsche himself, to prove it from Æschylus, a typical Greek and maker of tragedies, who sees *Moira as eternal justice enthroned above gods and men*, or Euripides, *the most tragic of poets*, or from their philosophers, Plato and Aristotle.

Euripides? Ah! To name him is to name the arch enemy, the incorrigible moralist. Upon Euripides Nietzsche concentrates all his artillery—rationalist, realist, destroyer, who brought the common man upon the stage, substituting knowledge

and logic-chopping for music, as if feeding the reason also fed the soul, who vainly attempts to base tragedy upon morality ; an optimist, an intellectual, who like Socrates, his friend and admirer, suffered from the profound illusion that nature was comprehensible, unaware that reason and science, to which he looked for the healing of the *eternal wound of existence*, merely led the mind out into the infinite and left it there. In that abyss *logic coils round itself and bites its own tail.* In Socrates, with whom logic ran mad, we have a turning point in history, a new ideal, the belief that by means of knowledge life may be rendered intelligible, a belief based upon sand, whose foundations are already slipping fast away. By this illusion Euripides was also made prisoner. Knowledge a panacea ? A plaster for an incurable malady that augments the pain ! How wild a dream ! *A thoroughly unmusical nature* this Euripides, who became infected by Socratic cheerfulness, substituted dialectic for music and, making the chorus a secondary thing in tragedy, diverted attention to psychology, to *character representation ;* so that men left the theatre to argue rather than to wonder and glory—shall we say that he thus lowered all the tragic values ? It were better to say that *once the genius of music has fled from it, tragedy is strictly speaking dead.*

To follow the philosophers in their discussion of tragedy, Aristotle, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche as it has long since become apparent—is to adventure

upon a broad sea and a long voyage, the longest, indeed ; or rather into hollow space itself, where their respective planets may be said to circle, each in solemn and dignified isolation from the rest. Nietzsche's globe turns, as do the others, upon the axis of a principle, the nature of music in this case, and like the earth has a second motion, it revolves around another, a central sun, whose light is a darkness and whose name is pain. This, then, is his "*mystery doctrine of tragedy ;* the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of all existing things, the consideration of individuation as the primary cause of evil, and art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken as the augury of a restored oneness."

If it were a matter of arguments the case might be dealt with. But this doctrine of existence as rooted in suffering—Schopenhauer's or Nietzsche's —makes no attempt to account for the passion for life itself, to explain the ineradicable love of existence and our reluctance to part with it. How can life argue itself out of existence ? They will have it that consciousness, individuation, is the cause of all our woe. Of course it is, but of our happiness as well, of everything in short. There is no other possible witness than consciousness to anything in the world, and to be either happy or unhappy it is first of all necessary to be alive ! How simple are the things one is called upon to say even in the best intellectual society ! Satisfy yourself that

existence is governed by Wordsworth's "never-failing principle of joy," and consciousness becomes the source of all our bliss ; conceive it as governed by Nietzsche's never-failing principle of pain and painful, by the same logic, consciousness must be. These are not very profound reasonings. And music, if it be in fact a repetition or translation of reality, the arithmetic of its structure, its soul set forth in sound, and pain the sole basis of things, 'tis but an easy equation, nor can music be anything but symbolic pain. That it admits, however, of sundry interpretations asks for no elaborate exposition, and to inquire into its veritable nature is only to take another of the many avenues into the infinite. Humour the imagination a little and the Pythagorean becomes the most convincing of all philosophies. That *things* are in some sense *numbers* the most modern science encourages us to believe, and there is, as Aristotle also taught, a *kind of relationship between the soul on the one hand, and harmonies and rhythms on the other*. So too, as Sir Thomas Browne tells us, *whatever is harmoniously composed delights in harmony*, and our bodies manifestly contain, it were, perhaps, safe to say consist of rhythms beyond enumeration, which preserve them—lesser systems —within a greater and undulating ocean of wider harmonies. Thus by our very constitution we are prepared for, and immediately responsive to, the arts which are rhythmical. In music we observe, indeed,

a peculiar isolation in that with proud sufficiency it concerns itself in no way with any other human interest—religion, love, philosophy, politics—but disdaining their assistance draws by its Orphean magic all men after it on the road of their desires. Whereas for our interest in pictures, buildings, poems, we can give a kind of reason, none is in music asked for beyond its own. May it not then, needing neither interpreter nor apologist, be claimed as in some fashion a revealer of the depths? Possibly, but bearing what message? We enter in music, say its lovers, a sort of heaven of the mind. It is a spiritual manna, no honey known to mortals sweeter, and to praise it in any ordinary measure, in terms short of extravagance seems to them not so much a dishonouring insufficiency as an absurd impertinence. Some of the Fathers, Temple recalls, "went so far as to esteem the love of music a sign of pre-destination, as a thing divine," and it would stretch a volume to record the testimonies like that of Schumann after hearing Mendelssohn play one of Bach's inspired melodies, "Were life deprived of all faith, of all trust, this simple choral would restore all to me." But is this the voice of pain or a revelation of some other kind?

Nietzsche's theory, a brave one, is after all a theory, and he finds—since this is philosophy—what he is determined to find, so that we, his readers, are involved, here as elsewhere, in a texture of reflections, intricate and deeply dyed in the colours of a tem-

perament. Doctrines disclose hearts and conclusions return to their beginnings. And not with him alone, but as indubitably with all the rest,the primary postulate determines the finding and tragedy is morally or æsthetically interpreted, is declared to teach or to exemplify, with but casual and hasty reference to the poets themselves, what the postulate requires.

For all his parade we need not believe that it was Nietzsche's intention to deny the moral values outright, but to challenge their sufficiency ; though at his brazen cry, like that of Achilles when he stood upon the trench and shouted, there arose on all sides confusion and amazed alarm. Yet he desired not so much to dissolve as to transcend the code. He desired the heroical sublime, *ἀρεταί*, the surpassing qualities, a higher flight than the race has yet attempted. He expunges, and is that a fault ? resignation from his vocabulary. He believes that men have done as much for the world as saints or angels, and is that untrue ? Like the Spartans at Thermopylæ, he puts aside hope but denies valour's dependence upon it. If we owe nothing to a blind and random universe, we may suppose him to say, we owe something to our fellows and ourselves. He exalts enterprise and welcomes hazard. *And Hera it was who enkindled in each of them that sweet, o'ermastering desire to be no stay-at-home child with its mother, passing a sodden life void of adventure ; but among his peers, even with death as his portion, to make his own the fairest meed of valour.*

XLII. CONCLUSIONS

Tragedy, though it includes the moral values as life includes them, turns on a different axis, and is seen by those conversant with its best examples to make pale their prescriptions and evade the cord of their measurements. It has as little sympathy with those who identify God with commandments as with those who identify Him with Nothing. Let duty look to its own laurels, beauty has here something, a compelling word, to say to us. The love of beauty, we may believe, is no less a native and noble prejudice of the soul than the love of goodness. Can duty be outranged ? you ask. Yes, though too high and hard for most of us, it is a second best, and there have been and are those of a more exalted spirit who make nothing of its poor requirements—men obedient to their own law, who do more than they are asked to do, like Assisi's saint or the Athenian Callistratus who, on that most pitiful and disastrous day when Nicias in retreat was overtaken by the pursuing Syracusans at the river Asinarus, cut his way through the enemy and having led his regiment into safety, himself disdaining it, rode back into the fight. All the demands of duty fulfilled, how unnecessary ! That is to say, how unsurpassable !

Let the advanced judgments make of it what they will and science give it a wise name in baptism, it is to this indefinable sublimity, this transcendence, the strange compelling attraction of such splendour —recall, for example, how Antony and Cleopatra won for themselves with all their faults the loyalty of Enobarbus and Charmian—that, as Nietzsche justly divined, tragedy is witness. Upon this pivot it turns. It leans upon our native attachment to the heroic, the mysterious preference for the best. Of high bearing, or conduct not calculated to succeed in the world, even those passionate to succeed in it are envious. Ideas void of its admitted values and measured by the world's standards an extravagance, they admire, and wonder at their admiration. These are the notes of its scale and the musical ratios of tragedy. 'Tis easy to see why men envy, praise and crown success ; nature goes the same way and they are nature's children. But she evinces no sympathy with defeat, and why should they ? Yet with loyalty or sweetness, like Desdemona's or Cordelia's, defeated or wronged, they are surprised, as was Johnson, into a passion of revolt, and so often and unawares betray a partiality untaught by nature, a preference they are in no haste openly to avow. What obstinacy is this ? Enquiry begins in wonder and here is material for it. Those to whom this love of excellence and this resentment at its ruin appears not at all extraordinary,

who find it less of a problem than the victory of the tortoise over Achilles or the flying yet stationary arrow of Zeno, have scarcely gone so far as to become beginners in philosophy. There is no use in tragedy beside this—to make a disclosure of the loyalties in our blood. Plainly there are lovely and lovable things and persons in existence, however they came there, which lay siege to our sympathies and exclusive claim—for no others can be admitted—to our natural and untutored allegiance. There are those who call themselves moralists and yet advocate submission to the ruin of this loveliness, to its dissolution,as an act of natural piety. If this be piety it is at the same time the destruction of tragedy, and such surrender—hateful word—surrender to the downfall of Œdipus, the sufferings of Cordelia—is the great betrayal, in the chiefest degree inhuman, infamous and unnatural ; no less than to embrace our fetters and put a final end to ourselves. Antigone, Desdemona, Brutus, Hamlet, for all their affection, for all their nobility, have gone down into the dust. It is over. Vice and virtue, beauty and ugliness, greed and devotion, sweetness and hatred are buried in the same grave, and we are to content ourselves therewith. But it happens not to content us, that our gorge rises at it. As the eagle from his cliff launches himself with unquestioning confidence into the abyss, which to the eye presents no promise of support,

so the tragic poets. maugre all the moralists in the world, entrust themselves to the invisible and divine air of the human affections. Nor will a soulless nature satisfy them, who would commit us, if it be a necessity, to an undertaking certainly hard, perhaps impossible—the infusion into the world of the soul it needs, the conquest of matter by the mind it lacks ; a task at least worthy of their heroes.

"Methinks," said Dio Chrysostom of the Zeus of Phidias at Olympia, "that if anyone who is heavy laden in mind, who has drained the cup of misfortune and sorrow in life, and whom sweet sleep visits no more, were to stand before this image, he would forget all the griefs and troubles that are incident to the heart of man." How shall we explain to ourselves this refreshing and consoling power of art, that returns and yet again returns upon us, like an occulting light across a dark and troubled sea ? The glimpse, the flash of beauty revealed in character or pictured grace, in lyric flight or shapely form, eclipses reason and puts the restless intellect to rest. To the inconsiderate its sudden illumination occasions no surprise, yet it outwits commentary and there are none of nature's rarities so well worth our wonder. If we propose to interpret it as a thing of chance or smile away such a claim as an extravagance, and with it a similar claim for tragedy, there is no more to be said. Yet

the tragic ending is somehow happy, we experience its *singular swing towards elevation.* Something with which we sympathise, with which we are intimately and surprisingly in tune, appears to triumph though the hero dies. What is to be made of it? To approach tragic drama by this avenue, by way, that is, of the contentment and happiness it brings, has at least one advantage, we are immediately at its centre and may without further ado set aside the theories which overlook this so essential a factor and indispensable element. Show us, we have a right to ask of future interpreters, how the analysis of character, for instance, can reconcile us to tragic disaster, to pain and misery either in life or drama, how an ingenious plot, how the emotions of pity and fear, however exorcised, or the triumph of moral principle, however unequivocal. You are to remember that the tragic poets do not lead us to pleasure by way of the romantic evasion, do not win upon us by vivid illusions. They do not tell us that men obtain what they merit or merit what they obtain, that innocence is a protection against suffering, or calamity a proof of folly or of sin. If we are to believe them the history of humanity is a history of painful and little-rewarded effort, an unceasing struggle with nature and a no less bitter struggle with itself. Man bears about him the scars of many wounds and the remembrances of battle in his

features. Show us then, if you can, how the happy ending is consistent with such pictures of the world as are drawn by the tragic poets, of unmerited misfortune, of sorrow, injustice and the final defeat of death ; and since in these contests with circumstance, with destiny, with themselves in which its heroes are engaged we see ourselves, how it reconciles us to the world in which we live and makes for our encouragement and content. *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.*

If now it occur to anyone, vexed by the contrary winds of theory, to approach tragedy as a learner rather than as a legislator, and to inquire first of the poets themselves—a way of approach not undeserving of consideration—it will quickly appear that we do them wrong to suppose they ever had in mind, as their expositors imagine, a rounded *Giotto's O* of thought, or believed it possible to distil into phrases the quintessence of the world. They are not to be imprisoned within a formula. They are not at all times even in their own secrets, since it is characteristic of them to speak, as Plato remarked, in words of an unsuspected power, in a manner beyond themselves and the meanings they propose. So that, as were Antigone and Cordelia, they may be in their own eyes wholly dark and despairing and yet, on the contrary, full of light for the beholder.

There is no commoner fault with interpreters than to make things easier than they are, and so

at the expense of truth to flatter the mind, which bites eagerly at the bait of simplicity. Clear and determinate ideas are the only profitable ideas, and we must refuse to be dazzled by any generalization into the opinion that the pleasure tragedy gives us is of a simple sort or within the compass of precise definition. What do we actually receive ? Not one but a multitude of impressions. We have pleasure in excitement itself, we have pleasure in the intellectual order imposed upon it by the artist, we have pleasure in imitation, in the representation of character. There is, too, as Hume observed, a strange mingling of pain and pleasure, together with a predominance of pleasure in a sense based upon the pain, mounted, as it were, upon a sensibility already sharpened and aroused, upon a concurrent agitation. Tragedy calls us to witness a conflict, which arouses the sympathies and forces us to take sides, dispels apathy, awakens the sense of justice, kindles thought, dilates the imagination, and throws the whole nature into expectancy, into marching order. We spring to attention and collect all our powers. Troy burns and the Fates are at work. Here is a crisis, a turning-point, a situation charged with significance ; here is greatness to admire, resource, resolution ; here are human creatures, like Antigone and Cordelia, steeped in their affections, who do honour to our nature and give us hope for the world ; here Cleopatra chooses

what becomes her, splendour in death as in life; here we experience a sense of triumph in defeat; here is the end which gives an edge and savour to existence, at once the soul's victory and the soul's release. Fear is expelled and pity no longer called for. And around and with all these the poet weaves the spell of his eloquence. The order and the beauty of the poetry contribute to our pleasure. The wine sparkles in the cup.

All this is certain, and perhaps too familiar to require statement, but the wonder is its possibility, that this very singular and extraordinary human nature of ours can be so warmed and roused by thoughts remote and of an origin altogether unrevealed in its known history; that it should harbour ideals so far beyond the lessons of practical circumstance, even opposed to its general current and running counter to the discreet teachings of time; that it should take no denial and persist in the attempt to measure the immeasurable, refuse acceptance of nature's awards, urged upon it by some philosophers as necessarily just and right, turn, sword in hand, upon her with demands to which she opposes a surly countenance, propose to find a path where no path is and a way to the heart of things. There is an opinion to which such reflections lead, that the unfriendliness of nature is either a touchstone or an opportunity, it may be both, and more apparent than real, a

mere reluctance or inertia without enmity and to be overcome. That way religion lies, not now very welcome or commonly received. But to old and defeated opinions the wheel of time often brings its revenges. They have, as it were, their rebirths and reincarnations. And by all great art, by tragedy, perhaps, most of all, we are led to discoveries within ourselves, and so to guesses, or, it may be, positive conclusions regarding that other and larger nature which has given birth to us. And what is nature? "My notion of nature," said Reynolds, "comprehends not only the forms which nature produces, but also the nature and internal fabric and organization, as I may call it, of the human mind and imagination. . . . This general idea, therefore, ought to be called nature, and nothing else, correctly speaking, has a right to that name." This is a capital truth and to the purpose. Things do not contradict each other, though propositions may, and it is no more than the application of the hereditary principle to argue from child to parent, from the complexions and features we find in ourselves to their originals. Hence we are, and should be, slow to believe either that our logic and understandings carry us to conclusions concerning the mathematics and mechanics of the world wholly deceptive, or that nothing in it corresponds in any way to the structure and requirements of the soul, to that master passion, for example—putting aside

for the moment all our other attachments and affections—for justice ; a passion which, if tragedy reveals anything, it discovers woven into the fabric of our being and no more than logic in our power to surrender. "I have within me," wrote Euripides, "within my soul, a great temple of justice." The tragic poets are no doubt in agreement that the Power behind the world has placed a heavy strain upon humanity and tried it far ; so far, indeed—since upon its dealings with us all turns—as to place deep in doubt its *principia*, whether of morals or of mind. Yet it were to think poorly, that is unpoetically, unimaginatively, of that Power as of majesty and strength *in excelsis*, the source of all that is, and at the same time as wholly senseless, or again as fair without and foul within, a heedless fountain of manifold and manifest injustices. The conclusion, though commonly enough entertained, strains comprehension, and appears to involve nothing less than the defeat of mind, a defeat it is not in the nature of poetry to acknowledge. And if such were its obvious and direct verdict our pleasure in tragic drama were hard to fathom and far to seek, which appears to emerge from the contrary conviction—we do wrong to undervalue ourselves, and the truth is much more probably too great for our present imagining. We are at work upon something and live, all of us—man has always lived—not in the present but in the future and may

be figured as travellers on some shadowed and forest way; hence it is more natural to think we have here a drama indeed, including many acts, scenes and characters, good and evil, vice and virtue, reversals, recoils and catastrophies; the time, past, present and to come; the plot amazing and open to still more amazing developments. The world is certainly great and astonishing, but, unless we make ourselves its equals, we may with some confidence believe it greater and more astonishing, not only than it appears, but than we can imagine it, not to be supposed easily measurable by the machinery of our minds, or void of greater intelligences and wider purposes than ours. Nature confounds prediction and we are in less danger, the poets would have us believe, of misinterpreting so vast a thing if we let loose, than if we restrain, the imagination, which may freely stretch itself without fear of outrunning reality. *Ubi magnitudo*, said St. Augustine, *ibi veritas*. And having seen some of nature's works it seems well within reason to acknowledge that miracles are not merely possible but to be expected of her, for she deals in nothing else. Meanwhile, *gente est nostre bataille*.

THE END